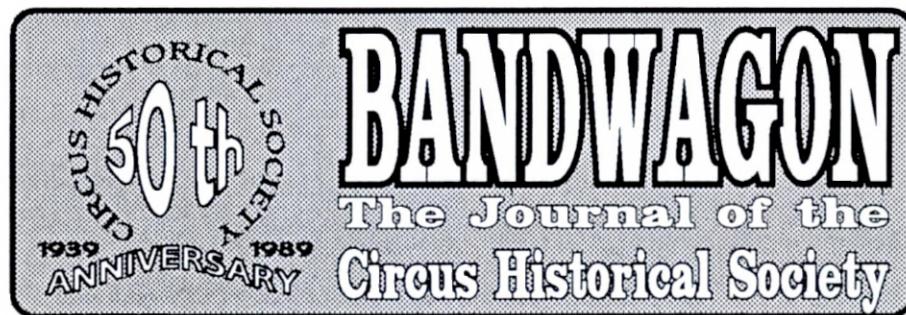


BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

November-December 1989





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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1989

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

Few circus lithographs covered as many subjects or contained as much text as this extraordinary 1903 Ringling one sheet printed by Buffalo's Courier Co. While the bill is far too overcrowded for modern sensibilities, it doubtless attracted attention, which, after all, was its purpose. The extensive descriptive text is a reflection of an earlier, more leisurely, epoch when the public wasn't constantly bombarded with advertising and had the time to read examples of the bill writer's art such as this.

Jerusalem and the Crusades was the first of a number of theatrical spectacles the Ringling show featured through the 1910s. Starting with Nero or the Destruction of Rome on Barnum and Bailey in 1890, massive productions of this nature were standard fare on large circuses for the next twenty-five years. Ringling's Jerusalem spec was produced by John Rettig, a Cincinnati theatrical personage who had previously masterminded the Solomon and Sheba spec on the John Robinson Circus in the 1890s. Rettig also designed a number of the new parade wagons used by Ringling in 1903, and was reputed to have created many

of the famous cottage cages for the Robinson show.

Thanks to Bill Biggerstaff for once again providing the color separation. Original lithograph in Pfening Archives.

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SEASON'S REVIEW

The annual review of the circus season will appear in the January-February *Bandwagon*. To make it as comprehensive as possible, readers are asked to send photos, information, and clippings relating to the 1989 season to the author. Data relating to smaller shows, school shows, Shrine and fair circuses will be especially appreciated. Material will be returned if specified. Send information to: Fred D. Pfening III, 2315 Haverford Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION as required by 39 U. S. C. 3685.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete. (signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr. publisher. (9-10-89)

CHS ELECTION

The election of officers and directors of the Circus Historical Society takes place at the end of odd-numbered years for two year terms. A ballot for the 1989 election is enclosed with this issue. Only CHS members are entitled to vote. Your membership number must be shown on your ballot for your vote to count. *Bandwagon* subscribers are not entitled to vote. Please mark your ballot, and return it to election commissioner Stuart Thayer whose address is on the back of the enclosed post card ballot. Individual ballots will be kept confidential and will be destroyed at an appropriate time after the election. Election results will be published in the January-February issue.

THE PRESIDENT COMMENTS

A few comments seem in order as I conclude my four years as president of the Circus Historical Society. The experience has been wonderful and I consider it a great honor to have headed such a fine organization.

The remarkable generosity of the membership stands out as the single most gratifying aspect of my tenure. I can't name another group in which over 10% of the members contribute money to the organization, or donate over \$15,000 in material for our auctions. These two sources of revenue have been the fuel that has fired our success in the last four years. If not for them, we could not have accomplished what we have.

This period has seen the *Bandwagon* reach new highs in both quality and quantity as each of the last four years has seen more color, better graphics, increased readability, and most importantly, more articles. Dorothy Herbert's life story has been the most popular article we have ever published and it is only the tip of the iceberg of our contribution to the scholarship of the circus in the last four years. One is hard pressed to find a recent book on the circus which doesn't draw upon material first presented in *Bandwagon*. This issue breaks new ground in the ever-continuing effort to improve the magazine as it is the first to be printed on acid free paper which will extend the physical life of the magazine, and the first to use perfect binding. In addition, this issue contains the most pages we have ever published.

The society is on firmer financial ground than ever before. We have run surpluses the last two years and should have money left over this fiscal year. As a result we have been able to keep the dues relatively low while maintaining a

"rainy day" fund should expenses exceed revenues. Our fortunate financial picture is the result of the contributions at dues time, the money generated by the auctions, a larger membership base, the Christmas ads taken by circuses and individuals and lower *Bandwagon* production costs because of computer utilization.

We have a larger membership than ever, growing by about 200 in the last four years. This, I believe, is basically a reflection of the *Bandwagon* selling itself. Ads in other circus oriented publications also helped as did a four page introductory flyer which was used in a number of direct mailings. Many of our new members are active or retired circus professionals.

I leave with a wealth of wonderful memories. These stand out: Merle Evans and Lou Jacobs at the head table of the 1986 banquet; Bobby Gibbs, Barbara Woodcock and Cliff Vargas as banquet speakers; the presentation on horse training made by Paul Binder and Katja Schumann-Binder at the 1988 convention; the seminar on the state of the circus business with six show owners at the 1986 meeting; Charles Simmons willing his circus collection to the CHS; Tiny Tim at the 1987 gathering. Many others spring to mind. I end my time in office with scores more friends than when I started. I got far more out of being president than I gave.

My only disappointment has been that we didn't publish a *Bandwagon* index which is badly needed. This is still in the works, and I hope we can do it in the near future. We have the financial means; the roadblock is finding a compiler.

Johann Dahlinger, who will probably be embarrassed to read this, was a constant joy to work with and did a remarkable job as secretary-treasurer. She was a tremendous help during conventions, and conducted the thankless and often mundane duties of processing the dues and keeping the books with unfailing dedication and good cheer. We are extremely fortunate to have her donate her time and talent.

Fred Pfening Jr., who has been the backbone of the CHS for more years than he cares to remember, spent a small fortune on a computer system and taught himself how to use a complex software program solely to do a better job in publishing the *Bandwagon*. No other individual comes close to combining this computer wizardry with the journalistic background, knowledge of circus history, artistic flair, and huge archive of material to draw upon that he brings to the task. Although he denies it, we would be hard pressed to replace him. He de-

serves more credit than anyone else for the current success of the CHS. I'm frankly in awe of what he has done with the *Bandwagon* in recent years, and I would say this even if he and I were not distantly related.

With this issue the Circus Historical Society ends its first fifty years. I have no doubt that the organization will continue to grow and expand its role in recording the history of the circus in the future. I am particularly pleased at the higher level of scholarship in recent years, by the number of new writers who have begun digging in the trenches of the past, and by the start we have made in documenting the 19th century circus and delineating the history and lives of acts and performers.

I will shortly become the fourteenth former president of the CHS, and unlike Douglas MacArthur I don't plan to fade away, but hope to have more time to work on my own research projects. This has been one of the best experiences of my life and I thank all of you for your support and for allowing me to serve.

Fred D. Pfening III

*Merry
Christmas
and
Happy
New Year*

*Fred and Johann
Dahlinger*

Interested in any information concerning the late animal collector, movie star and circus performer . . .
FRANK BUCK

MAY THE JOY OF THE LORD BE
WITH YOU DURING THE
HOLIDAY SEASON
AND THE NEW YEAR!

Best Wishes
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Home of First Monday Trade Days.

A Fantasy
in Five Acts

CLYDE BEATTY and the NEW YORK PRESS

By Joanne Carol Joys

PART ONE Prologue

For a thirty-day period each Spring, Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey Circus played New York. During the four years from 1931 to 1934, the featured act with the circus was the young American wild animal trainer, Clyde Beatty. In 1931, between the circus dates of April 3 to 26, an earthquake destroyed Managua, Nicaragua killing a thousand people, Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne died in a plane crash, Legs Diamond was shot, and New York Mayor Jimmy Walker faced malfeasance charges leveled by Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Spring of 1932 was dominated by the Lindbergh baby kidnapping, the bloody war between Japan and China, the sensational Fortescue-Massie Trial in Hawaii, the death of the great Australian race horse Phar Lap, and the election of Hindenburg as President of the German Republic. Four days before the circus opened in 1933, beer was legalized, and on the next day, the Navy dirigible *Akron*, largest on earth, sank killing 72, meanwhile George Bernard Shaw had arrived to lecture in New York. Spring 1934 headlines told of Dillinger's escape from a Crown Point, Indiana jail, the death of seven more Army mail carriers, and the legalization of New York race track betting. But despite these stories, in a mere 107 days spread out over four years, reporters transformed Clyde Beatty into a new popular hero.

ACT 1--1931-THE GAMBLE

March 25, 1931. Spring came to the New York newsroom in the person of publicity agent, Dexter Fellows. Alva Johnston of the New York *Herald-Tribune* claimed Fellows had been charged with the responsibility of bringing Spring safely to New York for, lo, these thirty years. By his own strange system of triangulation he works out the exact date of the circus opening and he has never failed to hit it exactly right.¹ Even the cynical Mark Hellinger of the *Daily Mirror* wrote, "The Circus is in town once again and the papers are all devoting space to the biggest man in the world and his tiny midget friends. Like everyone else in New York, I always feel happy when circus time rolls around, I don't give a hang for the show, but the advertisements give me the feeling

Spring is here, regardless of the weather."² The *Post* said Fellows "is greeted warmly and goes on his way to add to his clipping books columns of stories which have the virtue of being news and, incidentally, the best advertising in the world."³

The hopeful promise of Spring and the circus was subdued by the depression. Circus owners, according to *Variety*, had been de-

Harlem railroad yards, gloom was cast aside, at least temporarily.

"Miles of gorgeous rolling stock rumbled into the Harlem River Railroad yards. . . . Recently painted an acute dragon's blood hue, the circus wagons, their wheels picked out in green and gold, old ivory and mauve, came to Harlem in four or five trains of steel gondolas. The yards swarmed with relatives of railroad officials and with other privileged

characters who walked past the mysterious wagons guessing their contents from the quality of the snarling, chattering, wheezing, trumpeting, roaring, stamping, and scratching inside. Thirty-two elephants in trunk-and-tail formation made the long march from the Harlem yards to Madison Square Garden last night, the circus chiropodists running along side of them throwing liniment on the feet, which became annoyed after a mile or two of asphalt. The whole circus train followed, making the trip downtown from the Harlem yards, via Willis Avenue, First Avenue, Fifty-fifth Street, Madison Avenue, Forty-ninth Street and Eighth Avenue to the Garden."⁶

"The big arena in Madison Square Garden looked this afternoon as if an earthquake had been playing tag with a West Indian hurricane. . . . Camion after camion, piled with loose brown dirt trundled into the runways of the arena to dump the material for a new flooring. In this confusion of motor trucks, wagons, broad-backed horses, material and plain mud, hundreds of human beings dodging and scrambling in a kind of pell-mell lunacy, added their part to the chaotic scene. . . . As a matter of fact it was the rhythm of perfected order, the high note of discipline. The wild men sprinting, climbing, leaping, dodging, yelling all over the arena were the razorbacks and roustabouts, the hostlers and the riggers of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey. . . . They were trying to accomplish today and will try to accomplish tomorrow and Friday morning what ordinarily should require a week. . . . the best of shows is getting down to business and the bands will begin to play and the calliope let loose its gladsome howl at 2 p.m. next Friday."⁷

Dexter Fellows had promised that the 1931 edition of the Greatest Show on Earth would be 50, 70, maybe even 100 per cent better than last year's. After an absence of five years it featured a wild animal act, not just



Clyde Beatty in the Peru, Indiana winter quarters of the Hagenbeck show just before going to New York to appear in the Greatest Show on Earth. Pfening Archives.

lured by letters from performers and personnel ready to make any concession for work. Even though estimated drops in food prices would save Ringling some \$50,000, the show's employees faced salary cuts from 10 to 33 per cent.⁴ In another somber note, Ringling announced that none of its five acquisitions from the American Circus Corporation had made money in 1930. The death in Europe of Lilian Lietzel cast a further pall over the prospective circus season.⁵ Alfredo Codona would be bringing home her ashes on the *Mauretania* opening day. But on March 31, when the show pulled into the

an ordinary one, but what promised to be a true sensation.

The decision of the Ringling hierarchy to reinstate the wild animal act and to star a young man who had toiled in the boondocks for eight and a half years with the American Circus Corporation, may have been somewhat of a concession to the depression, but it proved to be one of the wisest decisions Ringling ever made. Clyde Beatty had rapidly attained center-ring stardom with Hagenbeck-Wallace and gained a large amount of press coverage, especially in Detroit where he earned some national notoriety in 1930 after being reportedly "saved" by his "pet" lion from the ferocious onslaught of a tiger that had knocked him down and clawed him. This led to an article in *Field and Stream* which was reprinted in *Literary Digest*.

In discussing the future status of the Corporation shows and their personnel, Pat Valdo, it is widely held, suggested to John Ringling that a tremendous act existed on Hagenbeck-Wallace, but that it could never achieve true star status unless it appeared in the Garden where it would attract the attention of the New York press. This publicity could then create an even bigger demand to see Beatty on the road, and contribute to Hagenbeck-Wallace's success. Now it would be up to the critics to prove the strategy sound.

The Ringling ad announced that "among its 10,000 marvels" would be "Fearless Clyde Beatty Alone with his ferocious performing 40 Lions and Tigers. The Greatest Thriller of the Century!" Frank Braden enthusiastically told of the "breath-taking, blood-curdling events that go on when Clyde Beatty and forty lions and tigers mingle together in one cage."⁸ While Dexter Fellows insisted that the decision to drop animal acts in 1925 was because officials believed many parents objected to bringing children to a show in which men and women entered cages with ferocious beasts, risking a horrible death at each performance. But they were hardly gone before public demand for their return became apparent. "So this year we have one bigger and better than ever. Clyde Beatty and forty fierce beasts."⁹

Some of the reporters wrote about their preview look at the Greatest Show on Earth. "The feature of the show," reported the *American*, "is Captain Beatty and his forty performing lions and tigers. Lined up in forty cages along the side of the Garden, the feline company gave roaring evidence that they aren't half as pleasant as Beatty says they are. The 'Captain' explained: 'All perfectly nice dispositions. No. No! That's not a roar you hear. He's just coughing! Look--I'll stick my hand in the cage!' He did--and the resultant outcry would have frozen the blood

of a Comanche Indian. But the 'Capt.' still insists that they are nice lions socially."¹⁰

"Capt. Beatty," the *American* continued, "took his big cats out and slapped them about the centre ring in friendly fashion--at least, it seemed friendly enough on the Captain's part. . . . Beatty, who is a slight and unassuming young man, admits he likes lions and tigers, but is very much afraid of matrimony."¹¹

The show finally opened April 3--the effectiveness of the gamble would soon be known. The first review appeared in the *Journal* where Marjory Belisch wrote: "sud-

ty, who knows the legend of the power of the human eye, makes one of his more considerable effects by starring a lion named Kazan into submission. Yesterday he apparently put too much English on the hypnotism, for Kazan distinctly yawned in the trainer's face. But this may have been due to a matter of atmosphere, for it was rather hot in the garden, especially for calesthenics and a thick mane. People who have been about circuses for some time said that such a large wild animal act had not been seen hereabouts for some time. It seems they are hard things to transport, and at one time were in such quantity that audiences merely yawned, like Kazan. But the style is changing again. New York is said to be yearning for lions, tigers, pistols, and whips."¹³

The *Mirror* raved that, "A new collection of wild animals, remarkably trained by Clyde Beatty, is the circus' outstanding attraction. Beatty alone in a cage with 23 wild beasts, lions tigers, and leopards, made the jungle beasts perform with the aid of a whip, a revolver, and a chair. And sometimes when one of them threatened to turn primitive, Beatty threw them one of those glances you've heard about, and Leo would turn and walk away."¹⁴

The *Daily News* pictured Beatty in the first action photo ever taken of the circus in the Garden, captioning it, "King of Beasts . . . it's not the lion but, the guy who makes the lion (and the tigers) jump."¹⁵

"Then comes an act that is featured in electric lights on the sign outside, Clyde Beatty and his lot of tigers and lions," wrote Joseph Cookman of the *Post*. "In an iron cage illuminated with red lamps Mr. Beatty's charges roar, snarl, and shadow box in an entirely satisfactory manner, and he cracks the whip, fires his pistol and brandishes a chair in a fashion that merits his billing. Every now and then Mr. Beatty displays the power of the human eye and altogether demonstrates to his audience the superiority of brains over brawn. It might not be as dangerous as it all looks, as the skeptics assert, but it is a good show."¹⁶

The most glowing tributes were yet to come. The *Herald Tribune* headlined, "Lions and Tigers Start Circus Off with a Shudder-Lone Human in Garden Cage Conquers 21 Beasts in 'Sensation of 1931.'"

"Not since Hugo Zachinni was first shot from his cannon has there been more excitement in the Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey entourage than the moment yesterday when the Garden was darkened and the beasts came prowling up the runway to cages lit with the crimson glow of jungle fires. Children stopped munching their peanuts to squeal as the lions mounted their perches,



Clyde Beatty, Courtney Riley Cooper and Alfredo Codona posed in Peru during the winter of 1931. Pfening Archives.

denly staccato drums rise in crescendo roll. And young Clyde Beatty faces death. Death from the mangling claws of 20 treacherous tigers. Death from the bared teeth of 20 threatening lions. It is the first time lions and tigers, these age-old enemies of the jungle, have performed together in the same arena. And it's no easier than it looks. Only the barricade of a thin chair saves Beatty from the spring of a goaded tigress. Again he barely escapes the charge of a maddened lion by an attendant's speed in opening exit bars. The whip cracks. The cowed beasts lurch, bound back to their perches on hefty pedestals. For a moment they are quiet. But the nervous twitch of a great tail, a smothered snarl, the lurking suspicion of cats eyes tell of hatred and lust for their trainer's blood that may flare, any moment into murder."¹²

No press agent could have written it better. The *Times*, as expected, was far more conservative in its review entitled, "Circus Opens Here, Glorifying Lions." The new feature they explained, "is the cage act of one Clyde Beatty and several lions and tigers. The bills said there were forty-six beasts, the program forty, an expert on the subject, thirty-six, and actual count did put the total number considerably above a score. Mr. Beatty, a young man, goes into the cage and cracks a whip while his carefree charges growl. The audience liked it and that was that. Mr. Beat-

shook their manes and roared. But the tigers were faster and quieter. They bounded at the bars and bared their teeth when the Garden lights went on. Crack! went Mr. Beatty's whip. Bang! went his revolver. The lions roared; the tigers snarled. . . . As a last gesture the tamer brought a tiger to the floor, then spreading his arms in mesmeric passes, drew the beast towards him as if he were on a string. When he had the tiger crouching at his feet, he bounded out of the cage, a flash of white, and the Garden rang with applause.¹⁷

In a wonderful article, Robert Garland, the theater critic of the *World-Telegram*, described his own and his young sons' emotions in a review titled, "Greatest of All Circuses Open." Saddened by the pall cast by the death of Lietzel, Garland found, "Mr. Beatty, a newcomer and a wonder." The program called him the "sensation of the century, the greatest and most daring wild animal act ever presented . . . for once in his lifetime the man who writes the program is guilty of understatement. Mr. Beatty is all the program says and more! Lots more," adds Roland, Garland's young son.¹⁸

The last review appeared in the April 18 edition of the often very caustic *Variety*.

"The principal time handicap and yet the Ringling show's thrill right now is Clyde Beatty and his wild animal act. . . . He was spotted 16th at the opening matinee when too much time was consumed in setting up and taking down the arena. Beatty was on No. 3 at night. Much too early for such a sensational exhibition. Even then with a horde of hostlers spotting the platforms within the cage and attaching the runway from the cages, 25 minutes [were] required.

"Ringling figured the Garden date needed something exceptional, although he ruled out wild animal displays several seasons ago. Young Beatty is all they say about him, steely nerved, spectacular, well appearing and above all a showman. Even the foreigners admire Beatty as a trainer. . . . Beatty uses two dozen big cats. . . . Entrance of the cats is a flash in itself, lights out and bunch lights turned on in the arena. . . . His top trick is coaxing a tiger to the ground and making him roll over. That's the feat he sells best, with his face within 18 inches of the snarling cats. . . . The effectiveness of the tiger's performance is the background. Most of the lions are at Beatty's back on perches--what a picture of big mugs.¹⁹

ONE MAN CAGED WITH EIGHTEEN LIONS AND TEN TIGERS PROVES HE IS THEIR MASTER

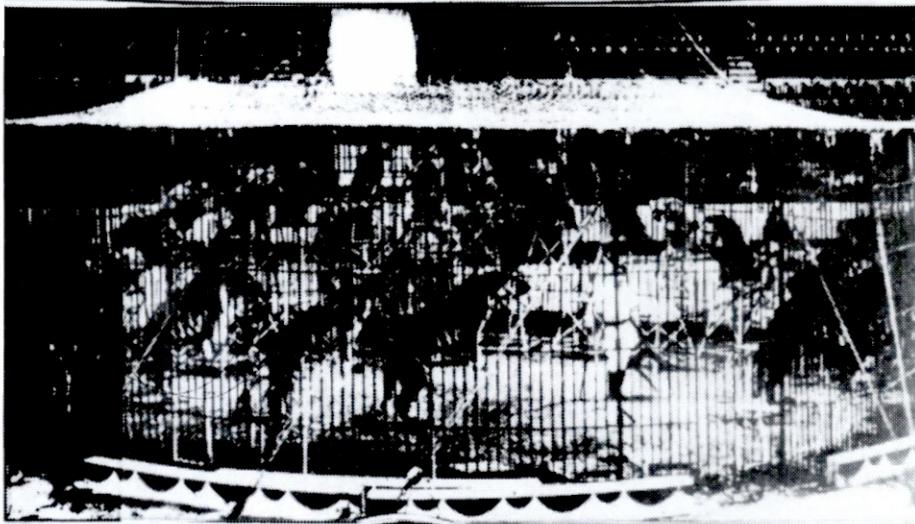


Illustration from a four column article that appeared in the *New York Sun* on April 10, 1931. Author's collection.

Ringling had his homegrown sensation . . . and the New York media had discovered a new hero. On April 10 and 11, two radio programs originated at Madison Square Garden. The matinee was described along with a backstage tour, an hour broadcast of the Circus Saints and Sinners Convention, sounds of the circus, and interviews with Courtney Riley Cooper, Frank Buck, John Ringling, and Beatty.²⁰ It was the first time that a real circus performance had been broadcast successfully. It provided a real test for the announcer who proved most adept at describing "a battle of wits between a man and a cageful of tigers."²¹ Nick Kenny of the *Mirror*, however, observed that Clyde Beatty, "the daredevil trainer told a radio audience from WOR the other night that if he showed fear in the cage the lions would eat him. Yet he was so afraid of the little microphone that we could hear his teeth chatter."²²

Fear of the New York jinx also stalked the Garden. Circus performers knew they had to lose someone in New York. "Tradition in the show has it that each year New York claims a performer who is either killed or hurt so badly he must be left in New York when the circus moves on."²³ There can be little doubt that most observers believed Beatty was the logical candidate to continue the jinx. Walter Winchell jotted, "This is straight stuff, and it isn't a publicity trick, either. . . . The animal experts are unanimous in declaring Clyde Beatty a fool to work 40 lions and tigers in so small an arena as he uses at the Circus. . . . They say he can't get away fast enough if anything happens. . . . Beatty, it appears, readily admits this and recognizes his danger, but he says if he gets through the season without being clawed up badly, or killed, his reputation will be made. . . . Imagine! . . .

What'll you Beatty he does or doesn't."²⁴

The jinx was satisfied on April 12, not by Beatty, but by 51-year old Charles Siegrist. In attempting the triple somersault, Charlie landed awkwardly in the net and broke his neck and ankle. Although his injuries were not fatal, it meant Siegrist would be in a cast for months and perhaps never fly again.

Meanwhile Beatty became the subject of two feature articles. A full column in the *Times* called, "Lion Tamer Finds Some Fun in His Job," that described his training methods and explained that he enjoyed the excitement and adventure.²⁵ On the same day the *Sun* ran the first true feature article in a New York paper on Beatty. Edwin Hill described a battle between the trainer and his lion Beelzebub that occurred during a morning rehearsal.

"Then began a duel between the two--lion and a man--which lasted for ten minutes and would have been worth twice the price of admission to the whole circus if the public had been in there to see it. But the audience was made up only of circus folk who had been going through the routine of their acts until Beatty poured his thirty-six cats into one cage. Used as all of them were to the thrills of the circus, they dropped whatever they were doing and concentrated their gaze on that cage of ferocity. . . . The big cats--twenty-five lions and ten tigers--leaned forward, mouths open, red tongues showing behind daggers of ivory--every savage beast of them eager to make trouble."

When the lion challenged Beatty, "you could hear people breathing hard all around. Better than anybody, the circus folk knew that young Beatty was playing with death. . . . The trainer won the battle with the relentless cat and then exited the arena smiling like the boy he is--not a whit shaken by his duel with Beelzebub and the incessant menace ringing around him. He wore a white shirt open at the neck; white full-cut riding breeches and a black sash, and black riding boots beautifully polished. He's a good looking young chap, of medium height, rather slim, but very muscular and hard as nails. He's as quick as one of his own cats or he wouldn't be drawing money from John Ringling today. He has light brown hair, gray eyes set wide apart and a rather pale face decorated with freckles."

Beatty described his training methods and then Hill asked him about the future. "Oh, they'll get me someday. They most always

do. Something will happen that I won't have been able to figure out in advance. Maybe I'll get careless or something. Or maybe one of the cats will go plumb crazy, as does happen. If that ever occurs, good night! Still, who wants to live forever?"²⁶

The eccentric O. O. McIntyre, the writer *Variety* claimed put the Broadway column on the newspaper map, became an American institution, who, it has been estimated, was read by 104 million people. His column in the *American*, "New York Day by Day," offered "a picture of the big city, the outlanders wished to see: unbelievably glamorous, unbelievably dangerous, a haven for small-town-boy-makes-good, a reservoir of the defeated and lonely." He never wrote about anyone by name unless he had something good to say. If McIntyre mentioned old-fashioned preserves, jellies, or apple butter in one of his columns, thousands of people from all over the country would send him jars, boxes, and barrels of delicacies that might please him.²⁷ On April 27, McIntyre announced that on "this day I gave my wife a wedding anniversary present, a tidy sum saved unbeknown to her. Then to look at a new auto I articed to buy, a light tan with red stripes, and to the Garden to see again young Clyde Beatty's bravery among ferocious animals."²⁸

Beatty, not surprisingly, especially appealed to children. On the last Monday of every Garden run, the show would be host to 15,000 orphans and crippled children. The big thrill was Beatty's act--when he "opened the gate to step into the cage with all those lions and tigers a great gasp of awe went up from the wide-eyed audience."²⁹ That same day the *Journal* photographed Beatty in action with his roll-over tiger, Tiba, and ran a close-up of the trainer's so-called "hypnotic eyes."³⁰

His popularity with children became even more evident when a ten-year-old boy came to Beatty's defense when a letter to the editor of the *Times* called the act "one of the cruelest exhibitions ever encountered" and that it certainly was a case for the ASPCA.³¹ Two days later an ASPCA spokesman replied on the editorial page that he had been assured by Beatty and the management that nothing objectionable would ever again appear in the act. On the same day, the youngster's letter insisted that he had read about modern trainers and how they no longer used cruel methods. He urged the irate Mr. Travis to "go to the circus again and sit where he can see the arena better, he will be convinced that I am right. I have several pets myself and don't like cruelty either."³²

Beatty had made a great impression on New York. In reviewing a new book about lions, *Rau Tau-Father of Lions*, Lawrence

FIRST TIME IN BROOKLYN!

The Man Who Thrilled New York This Spring
IRON NERVED BEATTY ALONE AND SINGLE HANDED

In a Mammoth Steel Arena with his
40 FEROCIOUS JUNGLE BEASTS
PERFORMING

will twice daily electrify audiences of the great

HAGENBECK-WALLACE
COMBINED
CIRCUS

Hundreds of Internationally Famous Arctic Stars Army of
Cleopatra - Mammoth Menagerie & Herds of Elephants 500
Horses - 8 Rings and Stages Crammed and Jammed with
Wonders and Innovations from Every Land.

TOMORROW MONDAY
DAYS BEG. AFTERNOON
Twice Daily, 2 & 8 P.M. - Doors Open 1 & 7 P.M.
DE KALB AVE.

DOWNTOWN JEWELERS
THEATRE & CAFE
HARDMAN'S
FIRE & MARINE INSURANCE

Beatty, back on the Hagenbeck show, returned to the New York area just six weeks after closing with the Ringling show in 1931. Author's collection.

Stallings of the *Sun* decided that since Mr. Beatty and his cage of cats had appeared in the Garden, the whole town was "lairminded." When the critic visited the beasts in the basement of the Garden and saw the lions lazily lying around, "Maybe the devil said to me softly, it isn't so dangerous, eh? Well it is not as dangerous as it seems and yet more dangerous than anyone ever dreamed."³³

This same opinion was voiced a month and a half later when Hagenbeck-Wallace played Brooklyn. "Lions roared, tigers snarled, the jungle growled its angry challenge last night in a borough of homes. . . . And when man-eaters go native, who will bring them back to the program? . . . The answer came in the flesh--Clyde Beatty. Like another Daniel, he walked into the den to cope with the situation."³⁴

Beatty was now billed as "iron-nerved," "electrifying," and as "the young man who gave New York its greatest thrill since Lindbergh." A June issue of *Saturday Evening Post* featured an article on him by Courtney Riley Cooper, called "Trained But Untamed!" But this was still the depression and Hagenbeck-Wallace was under an ultimatum. On May 6 John Ringling announced that the show had four weeks in which to make good or be closed and put in storage.³⁵

ACT II--1932-THE HERO

Hagenbeck-Wallace made it through the season, albeit, a shortened one. Clyde Beatty, however, faced an unbelievable amount of personal turmoil before the 1932 Garden stand. On October 31, 1931 his wife Ernestine was granted a divorce on the grounds of

cruel and inhuman treatment and non-support, after five tumultuous years of marriage.¹ This incident tickled the funny bones of gossip columnists. Then on Christmas Eve, in an unpublicized event, Beatty's girl friend, Harriet Evans, a chorus girl with Hagenbeck-Wallace gave birth to a daughter in Chicago. Four weeks later, during a rehearsal in Peru, Beatty became careless and was attacked by the lion, Nero, and for almost a month his life hung in the balance. Beatty recovered and made the Garden dates, but candidly remarked to reporters, "So many things have happened, I am beginning to wonder if my animals don't know more about me than I do myself."²

Recognized as a dynamic performer, he was now a hero to boot, and was becoming an increasingly popular subject for the Broadway columnists. During the 1930s, nine New York papers, plus the *Brooklyn Eagle* vied for an audience. By 1935, 15,000 news dealers plied their trade in New York. The most respected paper was the *Times*, established in 1851 by J. H. Raymond. The *Herald-Tribune*, was a 1920 combination of James Gordon Bennett's *Herald*, a sensational, sports-minded paper founded in 1835, and Horace Greeley's *Tribune*, started in 1841, was called the oracle of Republicanism. The oldest paper was the *Post*, originated by Alexander Hamilton. Like the *Post*, the pro-worker *Sun* started in 1833 by B. H. Day, was a tabloid, whose chief reporter, Richard Harding Davis, gave the public the first vivid pictures of Broadway at the turn of the century. It continued to attract reporters with literary ambitions. The *World Telegram* was an offspring of the *World* which had been founded by Jay Gould and became Joseph Pulitzer's in 1883. By the Thirties it was part of the Scripps-Howard chain. E.W. Scripps who had also founded United Press International, once said, "Our business is to get an audience. Whatever else it is our newspaper must be excessively interesting, not to the good, wise men and the pure in spirit, but to the great mass of sordid, squalid humanity. Humanity is vulgar; so we must be vulgar. It is coarse; so we must not be refined. It is passionate, therefore the blood that runs in our veins and in our newspapers must be warm."³

The most popular paper in New York was *The Daily News*, a morning tabloid built from scratch by J. M. Patterson and his Chicago crowd in 1919 to a circulation of 1,319,654 in 1929. Loaded with photos and illustrations, it was originated on the idea that "the 14-year old mind, even the 8-year old mind, is a part of the mental equipment of the average human being."⁴

As an answer to the *News*, the Hearst empire, which already owned the *Journal* and the *American*, established the photo tabloid,

Mirror in 1925. The Hearst papers, some historians insist, were not even newspapers at all, "they were printed entertainment and excitement—the equivalent of bombs exploding, bands blaring, firecrackers popping, victims screaming, flags waving, houris dancing, and smoke rising from the singed flesh of executed criminals."⁵ By 1935 the *News* and *Mirror* distributed 2,147,703 copies each morning. Today most of these papers are gone, and although many historians might look at some of them with distaste, they did offer the reading public a diverse range of opinion.⁶

The Broadway columnist was a phenomenon of the New York papers. They created a magic kingdom surrounding a 16-block stretch from Times Square to Columbus Circle. None was more famous than the *Mirror's* Walter Winchell, who could single-handedly create a best seller, hit play or movie. He demonstrated the legendary New York characteristics of ruthlessness, hard-boiled cynicism and great sentimentality.⁷

"The Stork Club, The Silver Slipper, the Parody, Le Pavillion, the Copa, along with Reuben's and Lindy's—or Mindy's—the neon names of night clubs, restaurants, and delicatessans flashed through their columns. The images burned in the national consciousness until they were as familiar as the neighborhood store along with the Broadway credo, the wisecrack, the cynicism and whoozy sentimentality, Broadway's smoky torch songs, its put downs and enthusiasms."⁸

The mores and behavior of a few hundred people, were emulated and talked about all over the country. This image was part of the lure that attracted thousands of young people to New York, "All of whom one way or another saw their name in lights or saw themselves hanging around with those whose names were in lights."⁹

The tribe of columnists—Ed Sullivan, Louis Sobol, Earl Wilson, Heywood Broun, Damon Runyon, Westbrook Pegler, Paul Gallico—observed New York and the sporting scene. "They made Broadway stand for values and attitudes which remain part of the American perspective. It was a world of wars, great ball games, horse races, championship fights, sex, speakeasies, sleazy nightclubs, the Depression, and movie stars."

At the turn of the century, the press increasingly found the masses eager to hear every detail and thought of stars. Broadway was often the primrose path. It was an era of great wealth and dire poverty. "It was a society that bred rapacious capitalists, prizefighters, entertainers, and whores." Life here, Allen Churchill wrote, was "freer, wicked, bolder, than anywhere else."¹⁰

Even in the thirties, which was a terrible

time, beginning with the crash and ending with the onset of World War II, New York's mood remained jaunty and cocky and nightlife came to full flower.¹¹

When Clyde Beatty entered into this world obsessed with the glitz, the star, the celebrity, he was unique, for it was not the realm of the



Beatty and Nero in Madison Square Garden during the 1932 Ringling New York stand. Pfening Archives.

circus performer. Except for the columnists' understandable interest in circus magnate John Ringling, the newspapers gave fairly standardized coverage to the circus. Normally stories covered the show's pending arrival, its setup in the Garden, the opening, orphans' day, and the annual appearance at Bellevue. Feature stories were usually comical bits about the giraffe's sore throat or the homelife of midgets.

But Beatty had a quality that intrigued the writers. Young, reckless, athletic, with a boyish zeal, he was the small town American boy who made good rather than a foreign performer or the member of a large troupe. In the circus hierarchy, the big cat trainer was usually the only of his ilk. Clowns palled with clowns, acrobats with acrobats, while the wild animal trainer's friends were frequently zoo men or animal dealers. He stood alone both in the arena and in the circus world.

Beatty's vigorous battles with forty cats were both dramatic enough to attract the theater and Broadway columnists and athletic enough to excite the sportswriters. In fact the cat man's two passions were boxing and baseball. Typical of many small town teenagers, he had come to idolize Jack Dempsey. When Dempsey won the heavyweight championship, boxing mania swept the youngsters and they soon were staging their own matches. Following two fighters around town to gain insight into the game, some of the more proficient boys were soon taking on boxers in rival towns. Beatty won most of his bouts and believed he was well on the way to emu-

lating his idol. However, the realization that he would never be a heavyweight caused him to lower his goal to the lightweight championship of the world.

His other dream was to play in the infield for his favorite team, the Chicago Cubs. He might have succeeded at this, but did not have the patience. The circus beckoned. It was romantic, meant travel, and best of all, was immediate. But even while he was with the circus, Beatty still worked out in gyms. While in a Chicago gym during the winter, a fight manager offered to take him on, promising him he would go far in the fight game. Beatty had just started making a name for himself in the circus, and he felt anything less than the championship in boxing would be meaningless. So he stuck to the circus ring, but in the back of his mind, his idol remained Jack Dempsey.¹²

Tex Rickard, the co-owner of the Garden, had promoted Dempsey into an extremely popular hero. Benjamin Rader claimed that there seemed to be a deep-seated need in the American public to produce and sustain dazzling sports heroes. These heroes, "assisted the public in compensating for the traditional dream of success . . . and feelings of individual powerlessness. As the society became more complicated and systematized and as success had to be won increasingly in bureaucracies, the need for heroes who leaped to fame and fortune outside the rules of the system seemed to grow." Now Clyde Beatty, himself, was on the verge of becoming such a hero.¹³

The 1932 circus season began like the previous year's, full of trepidation and doubts. In late February, *Variety* reported that outdoor showmen were wondering when Ringling would start gathering acts for his subsidiary shows, since only the Ringling roster was set. By spring, it became evident that the number of circuses and major carnivals to attempt the season would be at a minimum. The Ringling owned John Robinson and Sparks circuses would not go out, since the only hope for survival would be lessened competition.¹⁴

The other worry remained, first, whether Beatty would survive his mauling, then make the opening, and finally be able to perform an act that demanded such agility and speed, with an injured leg. On March 1, the papers had carried a photo of Beatty and the doctors attempting to secure scrapings from Nero's teeth in order to develop a serum should a similar attack occur.¹⁵ Dexter Fellows assured the press that Beatty would be back, entirely recovered from the "claws of the awesome Nero."¹⁶

On Wednesday, prior to the April 8 Garden opening, Mary Pickford, atop the Em-

pire State Building, released a flock of balloons, each of which could be redeemed by a child for circus tickets at the Henry Street Visiting Nurse Service, a favorite charity of the Four Hundred. On Thursday, Clyde Beatty rehearsed the big cats for the first time since getting out of the hospital, and circus people gathered around the cage to watch.

Wilbur Wood of the *Sun* wrote that among those watching was a motley assemblage of writers, managers, fighters, and promoters, who were habitues of the Garden and had heard Beatty was going to work the cats. The fighters commented on the lions punching ability and their often right-pawed leads.

"Amateurs or not, you couldn't get me in there with that bunch for a thousand bucks a minute," pronounced Dumb Dan Morgan. "How much do you think that man Beatty gets for fussing around with that cageful of lions and tigers twice a day?" demanded [Tommie] Furrie. "Maybe seventy-five hundred a week," guessed Morgan. Furrie gave vent to raucous laughter. "They tell me," he said, "that Beatty drags down a hundred bucks a week. He only got \$75 last year, but they raised him to a hundred because he got scratched up a few times and can't get any insurance." "The fight game ain't so bad, at that," was Morgan's comment.¹⁷

"Down upon the ground, as alone in the big iron cage as if he were in the jungle itself, was Clyde Beatty snapping his whip in pistol shot cracks over the heavy and resentful heads of his lions and tigers," wrote Edward Hill of the *Sun*. "Springing in and out among these gorgeously beautiful jungle cats, young Beatty worked like a demon among demons to smooth out his electrifying act--give it the last possible theatic touch. Only a little while ago he was flat on his back in a hospital, ripped up by a lion's claws, but here he was this afternoon, nerve not even flicked by his terrific experience."¹⁸

Friday, the *Post* showed Beatty sitting on the temperamental Nero. Asked if he was frightened, "Afraid?" asked Beatty scoffingly. 'Of course, they may get me some day, but you can't think of that in this business. It may be, too, that I'll get run over.'¹⁹

The circus finally opened Friday night before an audience inch-deep in ermine, since it was a benefit on behalf of the Henry Street charity. Although dressed to kill, the Four Hundred were not above eating peanuts or ashamed of drinking lemonade, commented the *News* society reporter. "Princess Aleene von Lichtenstein, fortified by peanuts for both herself and the elephant herd, sat in a box with Mr. and Mrs. John Ringling."²⁰

The *Post* observed, "It is the audience that makes the circus. It is an overdone commonplace that grownups take the children to share once more the thrill that they once themselves had felt as children. But last night, at the opening there were few chil-

RINGLING BROS. AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED CIRCUS

Presenting a Subsidiary World-Wide Mobilization of New and Amazing Features!

10,000 MARVELS including 500 Men and Women ARENIC CHAMPIONS
100 CLOWNS—700 HORSES—
50 ELEPHANTS—1000 MAMMALS
ANIMALS—NEW INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF FREAKS

MOST STARTLING EXHIBITION OF THE AGE!

The Wonder of the World

Iron-Nerved BEATTY

In a SINGLE-HANDED BATTLE with 40 of the MOST FEROCIOUS BRUTES THAT BREATHE!

SEE BEATTY CONQUER
The Largest Group of Performing LIONS and TIGERS
Ever Presented — THIS YEAR IN NEW AND GREATER THRILLS AND DISPLAYS

A 1932 newspaper ad used by Ringling-Barnum in New York listed "Iron-Nerved Beatty." Author's collection.

dren. Yet the audience was enthusiastic and the applause boisterous. For the most part people enjoyed the performance--as they will today and tomorrow and so long as the circus shall exist--for itself. It recalls that vivid nostalgia for the days when.

"The circus is the final resort of the true conservative. It never changes. It cannot change. Its audience would not like it if it did."²¹

The benefit performance was called a "perfection of wonder, mystery" and "excitement," by the *Sun*. "It became obvious at once that everything written, said or sung of this terrific spectacle (popularly called the circus) has been in the nature of understatement." The receptiveness of the audience gave the show a magical quality, why else "did the lions and tigers seem to snarl more viciously and Clyde Beatty risk more recklessly than ever before...."²²

The *Herald-Tribune* reviewed the show as if it were a play including a cast of characters featuring Fred Bradna as "The Master of Ceremonies," Clyde Beatty as the "Lion Tamer,"

and Hugo Zachinni as the "Human Cannonball." Beatty and his troupe of trained lions and tigers had "last night's audience teetering on the edges of their fauteuils in breathless suspense."²³

This edition of The Greatest Show on Earth was indeed special, agreed Robert Garland of the *World-Telegram*.

"The magic Mr. Kipling's Mowgli made is nothing when compared with the magic of the circus. The magic of Mowgli is book magic, the magic of the circus is ageless.... The circus is constantly the same you tell me. You see it once you see it always.... But, when you think about it, you wouldn't have it different, would you? What would you substitute for the smell of the tanbark and the horses? What would you use in place of the seals with balls on their noses and the man in the tight white trousers who out-Daniels Daniel in a den of lions? And then in the centre ring, there is, The fearless, youthful trainer, Clyde Beatty, demonstrating man's power over ferocious beasts of the jungle'.... In spite of these few kind words Mr. Beatty projects an act which is to say the least, magnificent. This part of it may be fake, that part of it may be phony, it's a grand act just the same...."²⁴

The circus became one of the principal topics of conversation at cocktail and dinner parties during the Spring of 1932. Karl Kitchen of the *Sun* believed it might have been because of the "dearth of new plays and other entertainments," and the "excellence of the performance at Madison Square Garden has inspired those who witnessed it to rave about some of its outstanding features--especially Beatty's great animal act."²⁵

The articles on Beatty followed a very definite pattern. Writers portrayed him as a small town boy whose obsession with animals led him to run away with a circus much to the chagrin of his parents. Beatty became such a dedicated and ambitious cageboy that he was given a chance at a polar bear act, with initially humorous results and later, because of more good fortune, moved up to lions and tigers. Not content with mixing species, he also mixed the sexes and continually increased the size of the act until it reached its present proportions. Patience, rather than cruelty, typified the big cats' training. The animals were preferably jungle bred since they still retained some respect for man. His equipment--the chair which acted as a shield with the legs tending to confuse an animal briefly, the gun, loaded with blanks only diverted their attention, and the whip was a signaling device--all were scant protection against even one animal's all-out attack. The hypnotic eye was only good showmanship and could never save him in a real predicament. The cats, even the best of them, could never be trusted as was evidenced by Nero's attack which almost ended Beatty's life.

From this basic premise, each columnist added his or her own touch. Alissa Keir in

the *News* added that "Although he takes great pains with the cut of his clothes and tries to slick down his curly brown hair, that won't stay put, you'd guess him to be a farmer's son. A frank, boyish smile." She continued, "Possessed of infinite patience; he never loses his temper. If things go wrong, he's inclined to sulk. He's quite the favorite among the big circus family; they say his growing success hasn't changed him in the least. Divorced, he has a little girl. Very rarely away from work. When he is, he dashes home to his parents for a visit. Doesn't smoke and has never touched hard liquor. The only game he plays is golf. Needs ten hours sleep a night. Very often he has the same bad dream—that a herd of lions and tigers is chasing him and he can't get at them."²⁶

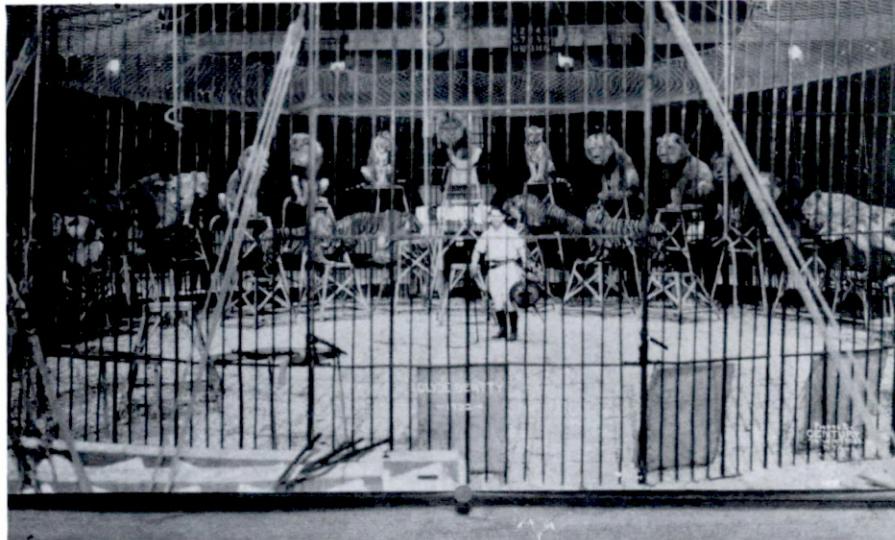
A few days later the *Post* ran a very similar story, and a week later, Joe Williams, the featured sports writer of the *World-Telegram*, devoted an entire column to Beatty.²⁷ Entitled, "Beatty the Lion Tamer. He Doesn't Always Win and the Purse is Small," Williams began the article: "A couple of young gentlemen dropped by to see me yesterday—(a) a prize fighter and (b) a lion tamer. It was easy enough to classify the prize fighter; he had a dent in his nose and a couple of pin cushions for ears. I wouldn't have tagged the lion tamer right off, anyhow, because I had never seen one close up before.

"This one would have been tough to identify under any circumstances. He wasn't any bigger than a junior lightweight, looked like an Amherst sophomore and there wasn't a mark on him. I mean that you could see. A few minutes later young Clyde Beatty, of Chillicothe, Ohio, the greatest lion tamer the world has ever known, was showing me where a tiger had bitten through his right forearm and where a lion had torn his right leg into shreds."

What made Beatty distinctive was not only his size and composition of his act, but that he was little more than a kid. The fighter, Alex Hart, a lightweight who had once battled Benny Leonard, had just boxed three rounds at an uptown gym with Beatty. Williams guessed Beatty's salary at \$300 per week, although he had heard it was less. He could not believe that anyone would face forty lions and tigers for such a pittance when compared to what Dempsey, Tunney, Londos or Ruth made. "Yet here is a soft-spoken, blue-eyed youngster, not much

bigger than a bottle of catsup, who twice a day walks into a cage bristling with tigers and lions and the payoff isn't enough to keep one-eye Connolly in monocles. Come and get me officer. I give up." Hart observed that at least, "You never have to worry about any mug trying to get your job."²⁸

Even the sophisticated *New Yorker* devoted a column to Beatty. The writer broke in on the young trainer just after his act, when he was getting his lame leg rubbed down with liniment. After a pleasant discussion, the author concluded that, "The arena is, in fact, a hotbed of violent and suppressed passions.



Ed Kelty took this photo of Beatty in Madison Square Garden during the Ringling stand in 1932. Pfening Archives.

No trainer before Beatty ever blithely mixed the species the way he does. The animals hate each other much more deeply than they hate Beatty, whom they regard merely as an annoyance. The hates change from day to day, but all tigers hate and fear all lions all the time. That never changes." The writer added that, "It is a big time in Chillicothe when Clyde comes to town with the circus. Everybody goes except his mother."²⁹

The Sunday, April 24, *Mirror* ran a full-page article on Beatty called, "Fights Jungle Cats Every Day," written in the Hearst newspapers' typically sensational style. "All around the cage were perches, some high, some low. And on those perches were 38 full-grown lions and tigers! Maneaters, every one of them! And this 25-year-old boy—this Clyde Beatty was standing in the center of that cage. . . . A red spotlight flooded the scene with blood." After the act the author accompanied Beatty to his dressing room. "The first thing you noticed was that he looked even younger than 25." In street clothes, "You noticed that he was not only small in stature, but thin as well. You noticed also that his eyes twinkled. Somehow you

expected to find a cold stare in them." He then related Beatty's close call with Nero. In telling this gory episode and its aftermath, the *Mirror*'s powers of exaggeration came into full play. "He was delirious for almost ten weeks," wrote James Bishop, "In his wild dreams he was being chased perpetually by a pack of lions and tigers. They never caught him, but as he ran, he grew weaker, and weaker, and weaker. . . ."

When Beatty came out of the delirium, he fought the doctors' plan to amputate his leg. He had supposedly contracted a strange jungle infection. "It was common to lions and tigers. But only thirteen (get the number) human beings had ever been known to have it." When specimens of his blood were injected into guinea pigs, the hapless animals died in a few hours. "Finally," enthused Bishop, "a surgeon took one last chance. He ripped open the infected leg from thigh to calf. Ripped it open right into the bone. There he found the cause. Two pus sacks. They were punctured. The

poison dripped out slowly, the young patient recovered."³⁰

Ethyl Gasoline featured a series of full-page ads in magazines like *Vanity Fair*. The April ad, called "Ethyl Makes Gasoline Behave," was illustrated by a drawing very obviously Beatty. [In fact, years later he would use it on the covers of his circus programs.]³¹

Meanwhile, the Garden, *Variety* wrote, had taken on its special aura, present only when the circus played there. "Clyde Beatty," Ruth Morris noted, "the tamer of 40 (count'em) lions and tigers, chuckling over the column squib that said he was too timid to manage a wife. Jaunty contemplation of the prospect that one of these days he'll enter the cage and won't walk out."³²

Variety continued that the usual rash of mishaps had occurred during the New York run. Alfredo Codona ruptured his arm muscle during practice on the trapeze and was out of the lineup, his former wife, Clara, had fallen and fractured her pelvis and was hospitalized, and Beatty accidentally fired his holstered blank gun while waiting to enter the arena. His breeches were burned and the wadding from the blank cartridge entered his thigh close to where he had been clawed. "Though in pain, Beatty went into the cage, the wound not being cauterized until later."³³

The sensational 1932 edition of the Great-

est Show on Earth had paid off. Ringling, the *World-Telegram* headlined, had built the best circus yet and won. "Stop Hoarding and Improve Your Product, His Advice to Business Men." Ringling insisted, "that if I give them the biggest and best show they had ever seen the people would talk about it and turn out."³⁴

Ringling was right. *Variety's* headlines screamed that the "CIRCUS WILL DO \$500,000--Drawing Top N.Y. Gross in 7 Years." The advance sale for the last two weeks was \$70,000 as compared to a usual \$15,000. One Saturday saw the biggest money the Ringling show ever drew in New York in one day. All this, in spite of a top price of \$3.50 and a late opening that missed the Easter holidays. The performance ran three-and-a-half hours and there was no attempt to cut since Beatty's act alone took so running time would be shortened when he left. Wallace.³⁵

After the Boston indoor stand, Beatty rejoined the Hagenbeck show, and in a little over a month was back in New York--this time Brooklyn--under canvas. The *Brooklyn Eagle* was not to be outdone by its Manhattan rivals and devoted a whole page on June 12 to a "Sportrait of Clyde Beatty, Master of the Cats," by Ed Hughes. It included a large cartoon of Beatty and a tiger. Hughes found, "You'd never guess the astonishing celebrity of the Beatty person by his appearance or his demeanor." Despite having the "most hazardous job in the world . . . there was nothing of the prima donna about Beatty." His dressing room was plain and barren, he was always in good humor, and enjoyed talking even a few minutes before his encounter with the cats. Five reporters clambered into his trailer along with some hero-worshipping Brooklyn cops and he regaled them with the story of his climb to fame.

His everyday life was fairly normal. He drank little, didn't eat before the afternoon show so not to be slowed down, went to the ballgame any chance he had, and usually spent the morning golfing or at the movies. Not very religious, he never prayed before entering the arena. "I just got to take care of myself there," he said.

He refused to divulge his salary and claimed it was in proportion to the gate the circus draws. Beatty did quote Carl Hagenbeck, Jr., who said, "Clyde, you ought to get out of this game. You can never get paid enough to make the risk worthwhile." His fear was that his nerves would finally get the

best of him and he felt that he might have another five years left. Hughes commented, "But you should see him figuratively drowning in mental and physical perspiration after



Strange Germ That Lurked in the Lion's Bite

Clyde Beatty had mastered the "big

Every Week magazine sent this page feature to newspapers nation-wide for publication on April 24, 1932. It tells of Beatty's illness after the lion bite. Pfening Archives.

each session with the cats!" Beatty hoped he could save a little money, admitting he was a spendthrift, and get into flying, "before something happens, of course."³⁶

But the *Variety* columnists knew him better. They saw the drive behind his affable, unaggressive exterior. Why would he daily face more danger than "few heroes encounter in a lifetime?" Why wouldn't he settle on being a bond salesman, bookkeeper, newspaperman, even a Marine, or with his eight hours of solo flying, a pilot? The same reason he did not become a boxer or a baseball player.

"Clyde Beatty may not know it, but fear drives him into the midst of a flock of snarling beasts, the fear of mediocrity. He is a showman, with a showman's urge to be a top-notcher. He could assemble the regulation all-lion troupe and audiences would be impressed. It takes just a little nerve to be a lion tamer, according to Mr. Beatty, if you have a flair for that sort of thing. But combine lions and tigers--their ancient jungle enemies--throw in a lioness or two, and you have a dangerous pack.

"Present the act with a specially written score, each phrase synchronized with every movement of the animals, build up a dramatic lighting plot, time the stunts to a hair-breadth of suspense, stare down a menacing tiger until your showmanship tells you now is the moment to cue him to droop his head and prowl away; and you have Clyde Beat-

ty's formula for the ace of animal-training acts.

"Mr. Beatty has thrown in this showmanship to outweigh his knowledge of the fact that 90% of his audiences do not realize the tremendous risk he takes. They don't know They don't know that he has gone out of his way to make his act more hazardous than any of its kind. But Mr. Beatty knows. And circus owners know--that's the important angle.

The season of 1932 attracted more than just audiences, it also convinced the powers that be that Clyde Beatty was a very salable commodity. Three national magazine articles appeared: "Beatty and the Beasts" in the July *American Magazine*, "Close Calls," in the August 6 *Collier's*, and "Animal Trainers Never Quit" in a September issue of the same magazine. The last two were by Edward Anthony, the editor.³⁸

In 1933, Beatty would add to his achievements, co-authoring his autobiography with Anthony, and then star in the movie version. The dauntless persistance was paying off.

ACT III--THE CELEBRITY-1933

Clyde Beatty's extraordinary popularity coincided with a national interest in the exotic spurred by documentary film makers, adventurous lecturers like Martin and Osa Johnson, and Edgar Rice Burroughs' widely read tales. Frank Buck, the supplier of wild animals for zoos and circuses, authored books and made hit documentaries. Films like MGM's *Trader Horn* offered "Four Lions in Death Combat--and 1000 more thrills." The daredevil, Roy Chapman Andrews, curator of the American Museum of Natural History, went on thrilling expeditions which then became the subjects of books and lectures. Many believe today that he served as the prototype for the present fictional hero, "Indiana Jones."

Variety called the Thirties the "halcyon days" for animal owners in Hollywood. Any-one who owned anything from a canary to a pet puma had a feeling his day had come and that the opportunity to cash in the movies had arrived. Producers encouraged by the success of *Congorilla* and *Bring 'em Back Alive* have "become animal conscious and

have not only entered into the wild animal field back home, but sent expeditions into the field to exploit the jungles of the lesser known world.¹

J. C. Furnas of the *Herald-Tribune* had another theory about the plethora of animal movies. He claimed that one of the "harbingers of the Depression was the great panic in the international market in Hamburg, when lions were going at a few dollars apiece and snakes at 50 cents a linear foot. . . . It might be suspected that Hollywood laid in some bargains then and has been cashing in on them ever since." A recent trend was not to cast all animals as anti-social gangsters and primeval horrors but have some demonstrate their palship with deserving humans, for example in *King of the Jungle*, *Tarzan*, and *Zoo in Budapest*, for which Jesse L. Lasky brought more than 500 beasts to Fox Movietown City.²

In 1932 the most successful of all screen Tarzans, Johnny Weismuller debuted in spectacular fashion. In fact, Furnas called the picture the outcome of "a satanic bargain" in which the best of *The Sheik*, *Trader Horn*, and the Greatest Show on Earth were combined.³

Circuses were also a source of animals and when they went back on the road in the spring, Hollywood was often forced into postponing filming. "The producers seem to roll from one wild animal cycle to another," wrote Kate Cameron of the *News*. The present one, she believed, dealt with animals in captivity, for example, Buster Crabbe's *King of the Jungle*, as compared to *Bring'em Back Alive*, *Trader Horn*, *Rango*, *Africa Speaks*, and *Ingagi*.⁴

In early 1933, Fox was in Malaya filming *Man Eater*, and Universal had two animal pictures in the works, one of them Beatty's *Big Cage*. Paramount also had two, while Warner Bros. and MGM each had one.

March 1933 witnessed the opening of *King Kong* at both the Radio City Music Hall and the Roxy simultaneously. The film was to be screened five times daily before 10,000 seats. No other film to date ever had such an ambitious opening. The film was produced by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack who in the twenties had filmed the unusual documentaries *Chang* and *Grass* which helped to give rise to the popularity of the entire genre of "jungle" pictures.⁵

With this glut of fictionalized wild animal and jungle films, Clyde Beatty, clad as a great white hunter, strode daily into a cageful of junglebred lions and tigers to do sin-

gle-handed battle. This was not trick photography or a group of freakishly tame movie animals, but a true confrontation presented live.

Now Beatty would be able to cash in on the wild animal craze with the able assistance of Edward Anthony, the editor of *Colliers* and co-author of *Bring'em Back Alive*, the book that brought Frank Buck fame. The initial result of this collaboration was *The Big Cage*,



This studio still was taken during the filming of *The Big Cage*. Pfening Archives.

published by Century. The book was released in March and the first reviews appeared quickly.

The *Sun* did a column entitled "Females Smarter Than Males in Animal World," that quoted Beatty at length.⁶ A day later the *Post's* Ruth Seinfel devoted her column to a similar topic: "The Lady Cats Brightest--But They are Also Stupidest, and have as Well a Number of Other Unlovely Qualities, Says Clyde Beatty." Seinfel admitted she had never seen Beatty. "For some reason or other I always arrived at the circus too late for his act, or had to leave too early. Perhaps the psychoanalysts could tell me why it happened so--perhaps my subconscious was terrified at the idea of the spectacle and so arranged things as to prevent me from witnessing it. Tyrannical little wretch, my subconscious. Anyway, I never, did see Mr. Beatty in his overpopulated cage." This, however, did not stop her from enjoying the book.⁷ The *Mirror*, whose strong suit was certainly not book reviews, did call *The Big Cage*, "a swell combination of stunts, odd references to animal intelligence, psychology, and lively photographs."⁸

A few days later, *World-Telegram* columnist, Joe Williams, ran into Beatty and Anthony at a mid-town pub. Beatty quipped, "What do you think of me running around with my own ghosts already?" Williams found this morbid humor for a lion trainer,

but also found Beatty, "younger, more buoyant, happier. This seems to be a characteristic of men who feed on the exciting syrups of danger--they never grow old, and as a paradox, they usually die young." Beatty admitted he had finally gotten life insurance from Lloyds of London, but only for the three months while he was filming the movie. "The long mortuary list and the shyness of the underwriter would seem definitely to confirm the authenticity of the glamourous perils."

Williams wondered if it was worth it. Beatty concurred that a wild animal act might not have much social value, but it answered the spirit of adventure in him. "I have been an animal trainer at heart since I was a child. It is now my chief interest in life my main outlet for adventure. And it has brought me complete contentment." Williams agreed, "Young Beatty knew what he wanted and he got it. What boots it if some feel the profession unworthy, aimless and trivial?"

At the end of the conversation, Ed Anthony, entered in with a jingle he had written to solve a controversy how to pronounce Mr. Beatty's name.

"Exhibit A:-

"He's from the well-known U.S.A. and not the distant Haiti"

"This feller with the chair and whip who's known to us as Beatty."

"Exhibit B:-

"His book I've read and found to be exhilarating, meaty, Soul stirring, full of epic scenes. (Don't mention it, Clyde Beatty.)"

Williams "turned to the great circus star himself and asked which was correct--Beatty or Beatty." Beatty, he answered.⁹

John Chapman of the *News* commented in his column, "Likewise enchanting is Clyde Beatty's lion-taming saga, *The Big Cage*. Beatty, the circus and the book came to town at the same time, which is showmanship."¹⁰

The prestigious *New York Times Book Review* devoted an entire page to the book. Originally luke-warm about Beatty's act, now the reviewer wrote, "Many thousands of Americans have seen Clyde Beatty in action. That remarkable performance of his, in which he steps into a thirty-two-foot arena with as many as forty lions and tigers and puts them through their paces, is one which commands and deserves all the superlatives which circus ballyhoo can muster." He found the book "fascinating reading" and one of its most "engaging qualities" is that Beatty does not attempt to "surround the business of animal training with a spurious air of mumbo-jumbo . . . and makes no mystery about his profession." The publishers wisely followed

the photo format of Ernest Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon*. These full page photos were deemed "remarkably fine" and an "admirable and fascinating supplement to the book."¹¹

John Lardner in the *Herald-Tribune* called Beatty, "probably the greatest animal trainer of all time, and his youth, recklessness, and poise certainly make him one of the most valuable of modern box-office assets." His present billing status calls him "the lithe young jungle god" in supreme command of the Ringling lions and tigers. The book has done in a "less inspired and artistic manner for the American circus arena what Mr. Hemingway did for the Iberian bullring." The story is told engagingly but it is most fascinating as a source of information. "His book is a good circus book, immeasurably assisted by the sixty photographic plates which appear in a cluster."¹²

The *Saturday Review of Literature* engaged Raymond Ditmars, curator of mammals and reptiles for the Bronx Zoo to review the book. Ditmars found the book unique in its explanation of animal training, its continuity unlike most circus books which are "simply collections of experiences with rather jumbled subjects." The narrative, Ditmars concluded, "is one of extreme ingenuity and patience, knowledge of animals--and bravery. And the latter quality is of all importance; it must be of a nature to stand battering shocks."¹³

For a boy who had aspired to be a baseball player or boxer, Beatty, the animal trainer, was on a remarkable skein of great reviews both for his performance and his book. He was batting a thousand and had nothing but knockouts. But change was in the air and some of this ill wind would blow Beatty's way.

In November, 1932 officials of the Greatest Show on Earth announced that Samuel Gumpertz, a Coney Island showman and Brooklyn real estate operator, would become vice president and general manager of the circus. The native of St. Louis had been in show business for over fifty years. At nine he joined a circus and became an acrobat, at twelve he acted with a stock company in San Francisco. Then he became, in succession, a cowboy, a candy butcher, a billposter, ticket taker, advance man, press agent, set designer, cowboy on the Buffalo Bill Show, promoted early motion pictures, worked fights, publicized Houdini, produced Shakespeare, built Dreamland Park in Coney Island, imported 3,800 freaks, and became a success-

ful real estate developer in Kings and Nassau Counties. He met John Ringling in 1893 at the Chicago World's Fair and over the next twenty years made trips to Europe together--Ringling seeking out new acts and Gumpertz, new oddities.¹⁴

On the surface, all was normal. "Dr. Dexter Fellows, herald of The Ringling Bros. Bar-



This photo of Beatty with Mable Stark's tigers was taken during the filming of *The Big Cage* in Peru, Indiana winter quarters. Pfening Archives.

num & Bailey Circus and spring, was wafted into *The Sun* office today wearing a yellow overcoat, a suit of clothes distinguished by checks about three inches square, a blue shirt and a silver-headed cane." This indeed marked the Golden Jubilee of the Greatest Show on Earth. Fellows promised that 2,000 animals and people would participate including 632 girls cast as Hindu Princesses.¹⁵

The Four Hundred planned another circus gala for April 25. Cobina Wright, the chairwoman, hoped to stage an old-fashioned circus parade as part of the festivities at the Waldorf-Astoria. The ceiling of the Grand Ballroom would be covered with a tent and the floor with sawdust. Box number one was held by President Roosevelt's mother and other guests would include the Vanderbilts, Chrysiers, and Marshall Fields. The event would benefit the Boy Scout Foundation. The show consisted of real circus acts interspersed with celebrities like Noel Coward, Fanny Brice, Ed Wynn, Bea Lily, and Jimmy Durante. Debutantes sold programs and refreshments, while Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin directed the orchestra. Noted artists Tony Sarg and James Montgomery Flagg would judge the costumes.¹⁶

The *Herald-Tribune* editorialized that "Ranking with baseball a national institution and far outstripping in glamor and suggestions of romance any mere competitive sport,

the circus again fulfills its recurrent cycle and is in town. So once more on Eighth Avenue there will be the smell of sawdust and horses and lions; there will be fifty elephants in honor of the very special occasion, the incredible Clyde Beatty in a cage with half a hundred assorted jungle cats, the traditional 'Buffalo Bill' Wild West show, human projectiles, clowns, explosive motor cars and the Marvelous Parisian Flying Ballet Plastique. As many of the component parts of the show as may be will appear in units of fifty, and those that are not in the fifties will be in even hundreds, and the chances are that despite the times, New Yorkers will crowd the Garden in fifties and hundreds too. For the circus is as much a Manhattan hallmark of spring and happy times as it is in Gallipolis, Ohio, or Birmingham, Ala., and Gothamites cleave to old friends and old customs despite hell and high taxes."¹⁷

But there was a new and sad feeling to this Jubilee, because for the first time in history no member of the Ringling family was present. Only John Ringling, of all the brothers, remained alive and he was ill and disabled in Sarasota. However, the opening night proved as grand as could be expected. Lynne Fontane, Alfred Lunt, and Noel Coward all rode elephants. The *Herald-Tribune* called the show as "lusty, exciting, and colorful as one ever saw it . . . excellence of casting and a comprehensive eye for the spectacular makes the fiftieth anniversary performance of the circus all that the most exacting might demand in the tradition of sawdust, animal smells and the big top."¹⁸ The *sun* deemed it "superlative. If anything, it is more than the human eye can take." The critic raved, "It is a most glamorous, heart-warming and soul-inspiring spectacle. It is along with beer and several other events of recent months, an indication of the turn of the times. The corner has been turned," the *sun* continued optimistically, "and the circus is just around it."¹⁹ *Variety* took a more realistic approach and explained that the basic format of the show had changed little over the last six years, but actually little alteration was necessary to the "world's out-stander in its field." With such "class artists as Beatty, Colleano, Wallendas, the Codonas, Rooney, Rieffensachs, Bradnas and the Yacopis, no show could miss."²⁰

Despite the gaiety and opulence, the depression wore on. One of its effects was constant pleas from all types of people who wished to join the circus. Another reminder was the Circus Saints and Sinners annual, "Big Top Revel," to raise money for infirm

and destitute members of the profession. Joining the circus stars at the benefit were stars of stage, screen, and radio like Fred Astaire, Tallulah Bankhead, Fannie Brice, and Lowell Thomas.²¹ The Ringling gross at the Garden also dropped. Easter Week produced turn away attendance, but the first two weeks had been sluggish, and the new federal tax drained 10 per cent from all ticket sales. The Garden jinx hit again when Alfredo Codona dislocated his shoulder while performing the triple somersault and remained out of action for six weeks.

"The summer of 1933," *Variety* warned, "is expected to be a crucial season for circuses. There is no sure indication that all or any of the big tops will remain out under canvas for the full season." If the shows did no better but break even, they would be shipped right back to winterquarters. The Ringling show would book ten weeks ahead, with further bookings dependent on business.²²

Depression or not, Clyde Beatty became a genuine celebrity in New York. Paul Yawitz, who wrote the *Mirror's* "New York Uncensored" column, reported that, "The news-hounds who are invited to Jack Kennedy's tap room dinner Wednesday [the circus would open Friday] will learn there that the tops of the cages housing a dozen of Clyde Beatty's lions and tigers, will serve as tables."²³

The *News* insisted his act was "again the feature of the circus as far as audiences are concerned. Wide-eyed children and pop-eyed parents gasp as the 28-year-old master puts lions and tigers through their paces."²⁴ They backed this up with a heavily advertised two-page spread in the Sunday edition. The ad claimed, "Clyde Beatty, Circus Lion Tamer, who's seen nature in the ROAR, and no fooling!--tells how it feels to have 65 tigers, lions, black panthers, and leopards just waiting for a slip up!"²⁵

The sensationalized article, "Caged with Beatty and His Big Cats," by Ruth Reynolds, followed the now familiar outline. It insisted Beatty, "has been severely injured at least twenty-five times in seven years, and he gets 'scratched' at least twice a week. But his face--with the help of surgery--is as unscarred as a Broadway matinee idol's." He loved his job, but would like to spend all his leisure time flying, which had been forbidden by both movie and circus executives.²⁶ A 1928 *Kansas City Star* article reported that while playing the Kansas State Fair, Beatty had met an aviator and become "air crazy," wanting to go up three times a day if he could, and had decided he wanted his own plane even if the circus management called him "reckless."²⁷

The *News* continued that "There's scarcely one black speck of love lost between Clyde and his cats. He admires them. They respect him. Love for animals goes to his dog. He believed his drinking would not affect the

cats' behavior, but could cause him to lose an edge in reflexes that could prove fatal. And now girls--" inquired Reynolds, "Oh, sure I MUST get married again sometime," this charming young man chuckles. 'No, I haven't picked out the girl--yet.' He had a small

It would end him. . . . They all have the rabbies."³³

The *Journal's* excellent sports cartoonist, Burris Jenkins, Jr., drew an exciting depiction of Beatty called, "The Man Who Plays Games With Death." Jenkins called Beatty "one game sportsman," who at the end of a performance looked "haggard, and streamed perspiration . . . his lips blue dry with the strain." Stripped, "his body is a mass of scars, mostly on his right side." Jenkins described Beatty as the "Youngest and best of cat trainers. He plays with death twice a day at the Garden--probably the most daring 'fighter' that ever went in there."³⁴

Louis Sobol, jockey-sized, bald headed, mustached columnist, who became an important Broadway historian, had a reputation as a decent and honest gentleman. He devoted his entire *Journal* column, "The Voice of Broadway," to Beatty. It recounted Beatty's enchantment with the circus and animals as a boy, and about him attaining his present status.³⁵ On the same day, John Chapman's column, "Mainly About Manhattan," dwelt on Beatty. "The nervous Beatty with the dancer's feet, always moving faster than his cats, was a superb showman, perfect in timing and display." Any thought Chapman might have had that the act was phony was erased when he saw Beatty backstage. "A wiry little fellow--the kind that ordinarily wouldn't work up a sweat short of a mile run--Clyde was shiny wet and dripping. All the time we talked he was nervous and jumpy, the way I was once for an hour after a boy ran into my car. He didn't have to tell me he had been under mental and physical strain." Beatty loved baseball, and was sorry he had gotten to the Stadium late for the Yankee--Senator rhubarb, but he had gone to a department store to autograph his book and almost all the 250 customers were women. One of them would not let him get away, and without a chair or safety cage, "it took him along time to escape." Beatty and the circus had refused another publicity stunt that would have had him get in the cage with the Bronx Zoo lions and tigers.³⁶

Paul Gallico, the *News* sports columnist, was like many of the sportswriters of the twenties and thirties, very versatile. These men were great readers of ancient and modern literature, magazines and newspapers, and were often extremely critical of their subjects. Gallico later became a prize-winning author of articles, books, and motion pictures. Two of his most famous works were the "Snow Goose" and *The Poseidon Adventure*. In his column, "Sawdust Athletes" he wrote, "I always think of young Beatty . . . no mean athlete himself . . . when I am writing about the courage and heroism of golfers and tennis players, and prize fighters and football players and the like, because when Beatty makes a mistake, the penalty is not one point or two strokes, or five yards, but six months in bed trying to get some



This ad for the Big Cage book by Edward Anthony appeared in the *New York Times* during the Ringling 1933 stand. Author's collection.

daughter, who he emphasized would not follow him in the business. He concluded that "They'll get me someday. But who wants to live forever?"²⁸

Just three days later the *News' Sidney Skolsky* devoted his entire column to Beatty. He described him as having had his face remodeled, looking like an over weight jockey, light and fast and sure on his feet, and "as graceful as your favorite ballroom dancer." He hoped to make enough money to retire at 35. "To keep from being sluggish, he does not eat his big meal of the day until 10 p.m. He loves to raid the icebox and his favorite is chicken. He's ticklish, likes beer, and enjoys riding with the police department on their calls." Skolsky, like the true Broadway gossip columnist, added that Beatty slept in the bottoms only of his pajamas and "generally sleeps alone." He frequently found it hard to fall asleep. Divorced, "he still likes all types of girls, blondes, redheads, and brunettes, but added, he did not think he'll ever brave getting married again. Gals are too hard to handle."²⁹

The *News* also ran two large photos of Beatty in the arena four days later.³⁰ The same day, the *Mirror* ran a photo and talked about a dangerous skirmish between Beatty and his big cats.³¹ The next day, the *News* featured a political cartoon in which FDR was depicted as Beatty battling the lion, "Depression."³² About a month later, Walter Winchell made a similar observation, "That Congress which enjoys having its own way is nibbling at its nails because it knows that Roosevelt has the people in back of him--a difficult to beat combination. . . . Makes me think of Clyde Beatty in that huge cage of beasts--the way the President handles them. . . . Hope they never bite him, however. . . .

shredded flesh to look like an arm and a leg again. The cats don't quit when the whistle blows. In case you don't know, Beatty is the animal trainer who works in the cage with lions and tigers and who turns his back on half of them.³⁷

A couple of weeks later, Gallico wrote a column titled, "Clyde Beatty Gallico," in which he covered the wrestling matches at the Garden and "only my superb courage, fortitude, skill and condition carried me through. . . . Quickly, plucking a leaf from the book of my hero, Clyde Beatty, the animal trainer, I leaped backward, lifting the cane chair from between my legs and holding the prongs in front of me, facing the wild and, infuriated wrestlers."³⁸

Beatty had achieved true celebrity. When six orphan boys in New Jersey saved a train carrying five hundred from a washout in the tracks, part of their reward was a trip to the circus. Beatty invited them there and they received special box seats and handshakes and autographs from the trainer.³⁹ Beatty was invited to parties, including one given by circus-struck Elizabeth Cobb, daughter of noted humorist, Irving Cobb. There he broke a Chippendale chair in demonstrating the art of lion training to Clair Boothe Brokaw [later Luce].⁴⁰ Socialite Bill Fahrenstock, Jr. invited Beatty, Con Colleano, and the Bradnas to a special beefsteak dinner with his friends in which they all dined wearing white aprons and chef hats. The deposed Russian Prince, Alex Oblensky, sang to enliven the party.⁴¹

The only problem Beatty ran into concerned the motion picture version of *The Big Cage*. The film was supposed to open at the Roxy and run simultaneously with the Ringling Garden stand, but a conflict arose when Gumpertz supposedly refused to let Beatty make live appearances at the theater to introduce the picture. He felt that although rental of the animals during the winter to movie studios was profitable to the circus, Beatty was being overexposed and the personal appearances would be even more damaging to the circus box office. The following year when Frank Buck's *Wild Cargo* opened the Music Hall, he was forced to make up to five appearances a day. Whether Gumpertz' belief was justified or not will never be known, but it was the first rift in his relationship with Beatty.

Even before the movie opened, Beatty's experiences in Hollywood made good press. On April 4, the *Journal* described problems with duplicating Nero's attack, the cats' dislike for the Kleig lights which caused them to refuse to perform after five or ten minutes, and the fight sequence which led to the death of a tiger.⁴² The *Sun* utilized half a page in explaining these movie adventures. Beatty insisted to the director that the cats only took orders from him and when they were through with a scene, that was it. The movie makers at Universal, accustomed to

RINGLING BROS AND BARNUM & BAILEY COMBINED CIRCUS



Presenting
A Gigantic
World-Wide
Mobilization of
Amazing New
Features
and
Innovations
including
The
DURBAR
of
DELHI
The
Most Sublime
Spectacle of
All Ages!
10,000
Marvels
including
800
Men and
Women
ARENIC
STARS
100
CLOWNS
700
HORSES
80
ELEPHANTS

-1000 MENAGERIE ANIMALS-
New International Congress of Freaks

MORE STARTLING THAN EVER!
IRON-NERVED
CLYDE BEATTY

IN A SINGLE-HANDED BATTLE
WITH A NEW GROUP OF
40 LIONS and TIGERS

FRESH FROM THE WILDS AND
STEEPED WITH JUNGLE HATE!

See Beatty conquer "MALAYO", the
largest and most ferocious
Royal Bengal Tiger that breathes!

MULTITUDE OF SURPRISING
GOLDEN JUBILEE FEATURES
ALL NEW TO AMERICA!

The 1933 Ringling New York newspaper ads continued to list "Iron-Nerved Clyde Beatty." Author's collection.

the unusually tame animals used in films, were flabbergasted at the toughness of the animals. The cameramen remained terrified throughout the filming.

The picture like the act was a terrific strain especially since the cats were trained just enough to take "the greenness off. And I change the routine every day," explained Beatty. "They never know just what they're going to do. Otherwise they'd go through the

routine so fast that I couldn't keep up with them."⁴³ On April 9, the *Times* ran a similar story called, "Thrills Galore."⁴⁴ *Variety* followed up with a major story, "Even Lions Go Native in Hollywood, Beatty Finds in Own Nature Study." The trainer charged the Hollywood lions with "being traitors to their breed. Beneath their hypocritically savage manes lurks the dry rot of Hollywood civilization. They're soft, they've grown fond of men instead of fearing him, and a lion who likes man, in Mr. Beatty's estimation, is just a bum."

When the trainer went to Hollywood, he didn't ask to meet any stars, not human ones, just Jackie and Jimmie, the movie lions. He met them and "he wouldn't take a hair from the mane of his crude beasts for all the polite lions in Hollywood. His cats have no inhibitions or repressions. Mr. Beatty's lions and tigers were not impressed by Hollywood. They can take it or leave it. Just another jump in the route, they found it, and so did Mr. Beatty."⁴⁵ These exploits also led to an article, "Tigers Never Bluff" in the September issue of *Travel* and "Working the Cats in the Kleig Lights," in the April *Literary Digest*.⁴⁶

The film finally opened in New York at the Mayfair on May 8. The reviews followed a definite pattern. The *Sun* critic, John S. Cohen, Jr., called the plot very weak but some scenes were "the most legitimate circus episodes ever filmed." The picture is a "worthy tribute to the bravery of this young man-the youngest and most prominent lion tamer alive." Cohen added, "Incidentally he betrays an ingratiating and likeable screen personality. He might even tame the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lion and be a star in his own right."⁴⁷

Kate Cameron of the *News* gave the movie three stars. She deemed it "thrilling" and "thoroughly absorbing" whenever Beatty was seen working the lions and tigers. She reiterated that the plot and dialogue were poor, but Beatty so good you should not miss the film.⁴⁸ Mordaunt Hall of the *Times* concurred that the scenes with Beatty were highly exciting and offered closeups one could never see at the circus. "The excitement is real and it's therefore worth ten times the wild shooting and popping of machine guns in gangster stories." Beatty might not bother much about dialogue, but "his actions speak louder than mere words."⁴⁹ The *Mirror's* reviewer found Beatty's work with the big cats exciting and stirring as usual. "He has a pleasant voice and surprising ease before the cameras." He claimed the story was not equal to his assets, or the magnificent animals who were the real stars.⁵⁰

Richard Watts, Jr. of the *Herald-Tribune* was more negative on the film, feeling it would face two problems; the plethora of animal pictures already released, and the humanitarians' outcry over the lion-tiger fight. However, the movie did provide an "excellent chance to show us the skill, the courage,

and the showmanship required by his act and since it has excellently photographed, it can be said *The Big Cage* accomplishes what it sets out to do. Although a great showman, Beatty is not an actor, but is pleasant and likeable.⁵¹ The *World-Telegram* reiterated that the picture had many faults, but "as a thriller, is pretty hard to beat." The lion and tiger fight alone is worth the price of admission.⁵²

Thornton Delahanty of the *Post* insisted there "is no reason why the bloodthirsty shouldn't enjoy, as I did, the mishaps and near catastrophes of the animal training business." It contains lurid details, and behind the scenes views the viewer could never enjoy at the circus.⁵³

Billboard said the "picture's all Beatty and he proves himself entirely capable of carrying it. . . . Beatty carries himself excellently by the simple expedient of being perfectly natural, turning in a far better performance than most celebrities who are made actors overnight." The studies of animals and photography were excellent throughout.⁵⁴ *Variety* found it exciting "now and then," and the lion and tiger fight is a "corking sequence." The Hays office report on family acceptability of pictures felt *The Big Cage* opening was marred "by bits of coarse language," further the film had no "femme appeal" other than to mothers "seeking film fare for the kiddies."⁵⁵

None of the reviews were as humorous as those in the Indianapolis papers, one of which said, "Clyde Beatty's portrayal of Clyde Beatty is flawless and his collection of cats is superb."⁵⁶ A little later they claimed that he played himself better than an actor could have. They hinted that the "daring young man was greatly disturbed at the efforts of tattlers to establish a romance between him and his leading lady, Anita Page. The way he handles a pack of lions and tigers, you wouldn't suppose he was shy of girls would you?"⁵⁷

On May 15, the *New York Daily News* editorialized that the eight minute lion and tiger battle in *The Big Cage* was the most exciting they had seen in current movies. "Nowadays we can see these magnificent fights, which cost the Roman emperors so much, for 50 cents. That certainly looks like progress. Lets have more and better animal fights in the movies." Despite "animalarians" antipathy, it is animal nature to fight, and "there isn't a more terrific and satisfying decisive spectacle than a fight."

"If all this sounds a trifle pagan, better

charge it up to the fact that, like almost everybody else, we're so sick and tired of being told by the holier than thou what is good for us and what isn't. The holier-than-thou brought on the pagan reaction that seems to be setting in today, and they only have themselves to blame."⁵⁸

A month later, Invincible Films released, *Taming the Jungle*, trying to cash in on the success of the Beatty film. It showed a number of trainers such as Mel Koontz and Olga Celeste, teaching their big cat pupils. However, the *Mirror's* movie critic observed, "Not one of the trainers is the equal of Beatty in showmanship. That young man is able to make his magnificent performers appear una-

chargeable, who rejoined the outfit after opening with the Ringling show in New York and Boston. Beatty looks better under canvas and his performance is better. The big cats were much more lively than in the Garden, and the solo tiger tricks were worked more smoothly. Beatty, first a showman and secondly a trainer, came out of the cage dripping with perspiration. He is the most publicized and sensational act under canvas."⁶¹

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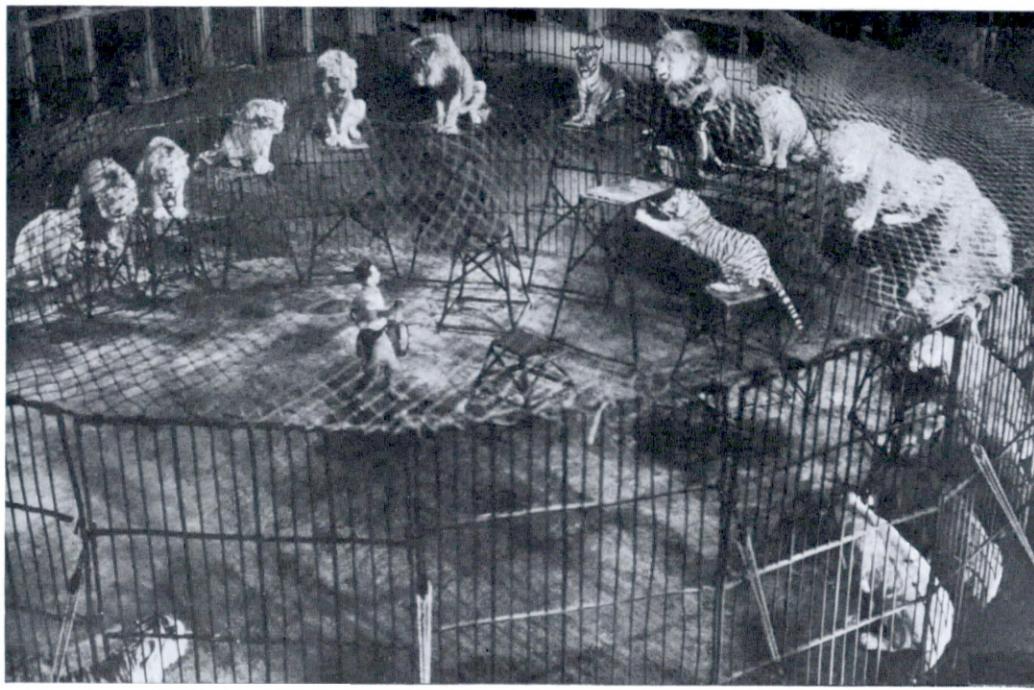


This six column article on Beatty appeared in the *New York Evening Journal* on April 4, 1933, four days prior to the opening of the Ringling engagement. Author's collection.

fraid of the whips, chairs, and pistols which are the paraphernalia of the catmen. The lions, tigers, leopards and pumas of [*Taming the Jungle*] seem broken."⁵⁹

Beatty had proven himself to the Broadway columnists and sportswriters, but there was a long season ahead and his showmanship would be needed to keep Hagenbeck-Wallace afloat. *Variety's* review of Hagenbeck-Wallace in Chicago, sans Beatty, called it a "Depression circus designed for 80 cents and diminished intakes. . . . Poodles Hanneman and his family is about the beginning and the end of anything like circus fame in the show." The rest of the acts were written off as apparent non-entities. The spec was horrible, with the singing, "shrill, off-key, and unintelligible" and the dancing as "uneven as the sawdust surface."⁶⁰

At the end of June when Hagenbeck-Wallace played the Bronx, *Variety* called it an excellent show living up to its reputation as the second best show in the nation. "The stand-out turns stood out. . . . There is an air of youth . . . that counts. Show is speedy throughout." Gumpertz warned the show that it would have to operate on its own or be pulled off the road. Taking the challenge, it effectively piled up a bankroll in a month and a half. "The show's top feature of course,



This photo of the Clyde Beatty act appeared in the book *The Big Cage* published in 1933. Pfening Archives.

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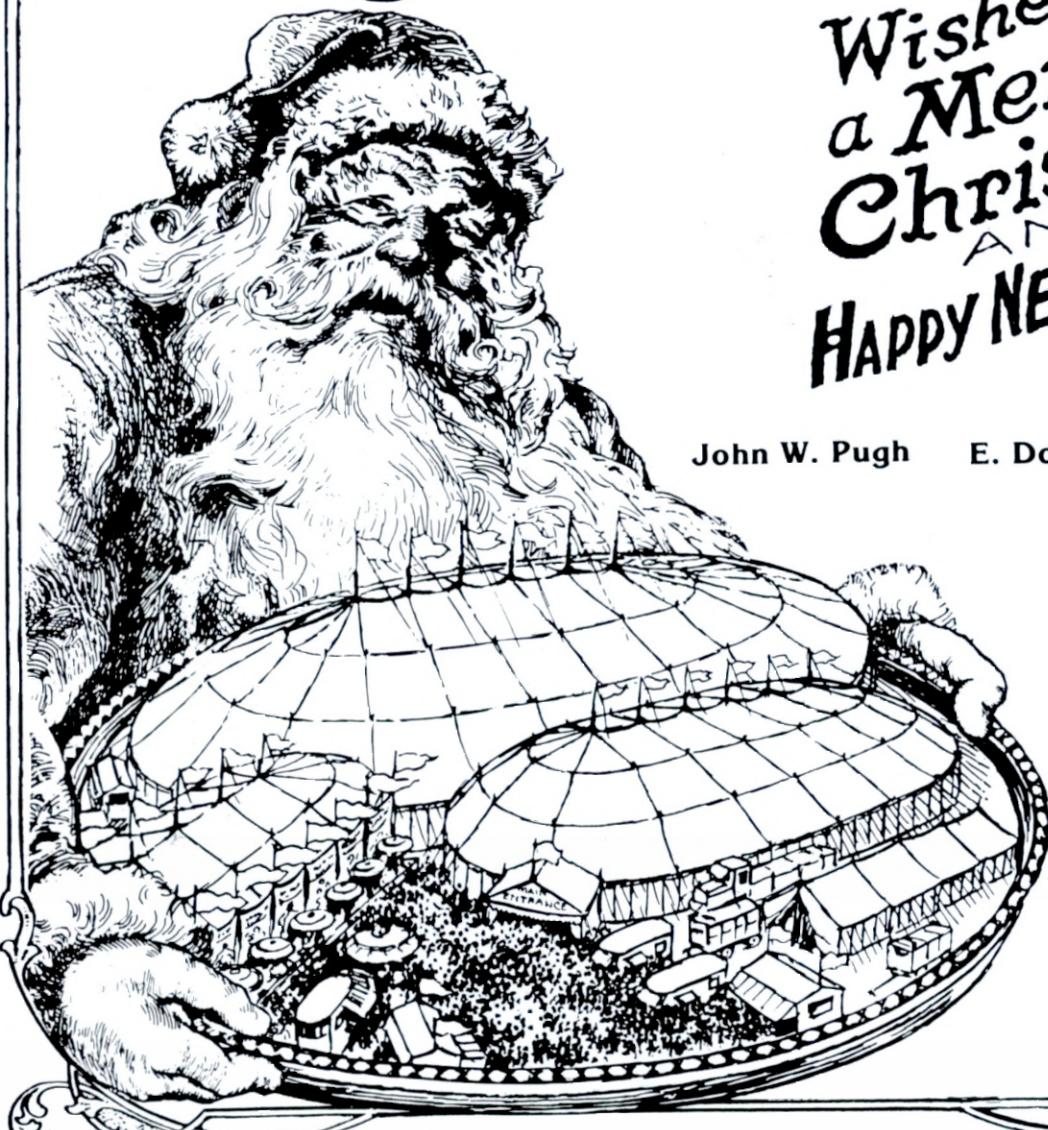
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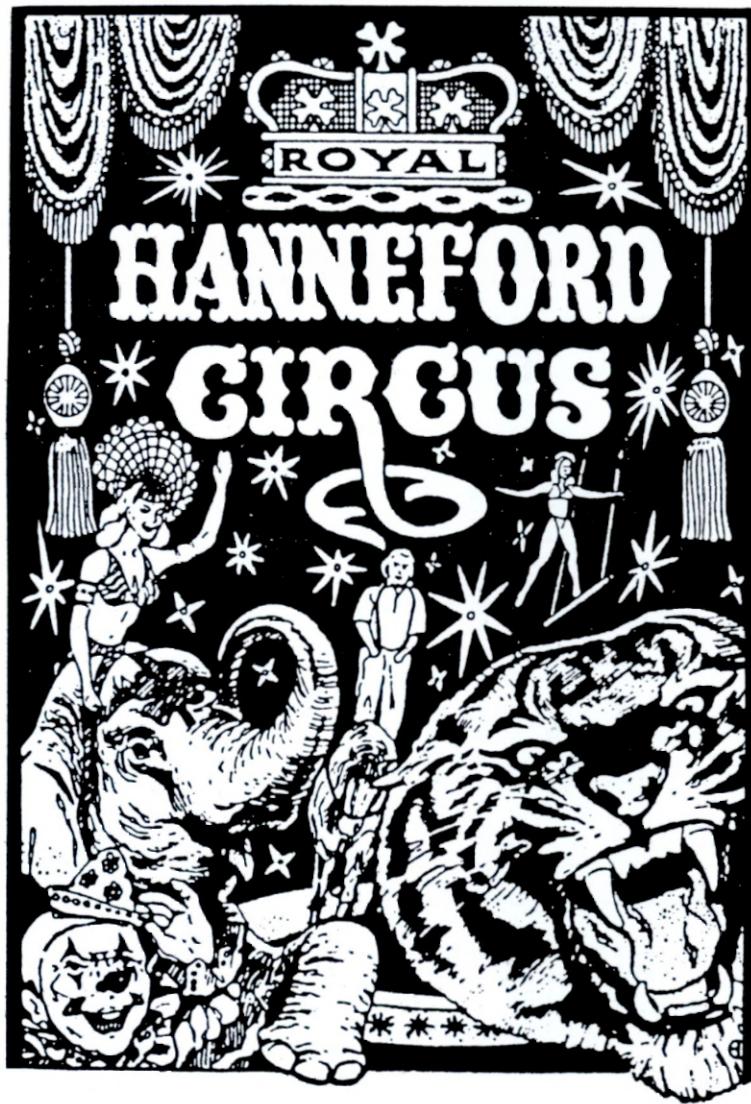
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Short Sketches
Of Former Shows

TIGER BILL'S WILD WEST SHOW

Season of 1952
By Joseph T. Bradbury

Leo Snyder, the second generation of his family to use the Tiger Bill moniker, put out a medium sized motorized show in 1952. He felt that due to the tremendous popularity of Hopalong Cassidy and other western oriented shows on TV that the time was ripe to give the American public a real, honest to goodness, old time live wild west show. It was to be presented in a traditional open air arena, just like Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill did it, but of course on a much smaller scale. He was wrong in this judgement as his Tiger Bill Wild West Show would last slightly less than three months. However, there were many other factors which killed the show other than a general unacceptance of this type of live entertainment by the public.

But first let us look at the history of the title which had been in use off and on for over forty years. Frank C. Fisher, a former show owner, writing in the February 1945 *Bandwagon* gave a fine summary of the Tiger Bill title. According to Fisher one Dave Perriene out of Eaton Rapids, Michigan was the first to use the name. He was a well known showman who had numerous circuses and wild west shows on the road from the late 1890s until the mid teens.

Dates for the Perriene Tiger Bill show were 1909 to 1913. Some accounts put the show on ten cars, others on five, the latter probably being correct.

Col. Emmett Synder, father of Leo, now enters the picture. He was a show owner as early as 1899 when he fielded Synder's New Model Circus. During the early 1900s his

A Tiger Bill trailer in McGehee, Arkansas April 18, 1952. The gas tank on outside suggests it may have been the cookhouse unit. Tom Parkinson photo.



Leo (Tiger Bill) Synder and his wife on Seils-Sterling Circus in 1937. Author's collection.

shows had various titles, like Snyder Bros. and Downker in 1905 and Synder Bros. in 1906. In 1909 he operated Snyder Bros. Wild West. Most of these shows probably traveled overland.

In 1914 Emmett Synder bought the Tiger Bill Wild West show from Perriene and operated it in 1914 and 1915. He also adopted the Tiger Bill name and for the rest of his days was identified by it. When his son Leo became old enough to be associated with him he became known as "Young Tiger Bill."

According to Fisher, Emmett and Leo together took out a new overland wild west show in 1926. Leo left it after the 1927 season. In 1928 Emmett teamed up with Harry Beagles of Edwardsburg, Michigan for the operation of a show, still using the Tiger Bill title. This show toured only one season and in 1929 Emmett was with the D. D. Murphy Shows until it closed, a victim of the great depression.

By 1935 Emmett was back on his feet and together with G. W. McIntosh of Bellview, Michigan framed and operated a motorized Tiger Bill show. Leo was with this one, the last time he was teamed up with his father. This new Tiger Bill show was on the road at least through the 1937 season, and possibly did go out for a short time in 1938. Emmett died in late 1938 or early 1939. These shows of the 1930s were presented under a circus big top rather than in an open arena and the program contained both circus and wild west acts.

In the meantime Leo was active with various circuses through the 1930s, nearly always serving as equestrian director and/or running a wild west aftershow. Both Snyders were highly skilled in all wild west acts. Leo was with Al. F. Wheeler in 1930 and 1932, Russell Bros. in 1933 and Seils-Sterling in 1931, 1937 and 1938.

After Emmett's death Leo became the senior Tiger Bill and retained the name for the remainder of his days in show business.

In 1941 Leo Synder framed and operated his own motorized Tiger Bill show. It was rather small and used a regular round end big top with three middles. The performance

The Tiger Bill equipment semi-trailer on the lot in McGehee, Arkansas. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.





Truck no. 30 on the McGehee lot in 1952. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.

featured both circus and wild west numbers. Vehicles were titled Tiger Bill's Show. The show was out only one season. In 1942 Leo joined Ben Davenport's Dailey Bros. Circus in the position of equestrian director. With the exception of 1945 when he moved over for part of the season to the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus in the same job, he was with Davenport through the decade of the 1940s. During this period the Dailey show grew dramatically from a medium size motorized show to a large railed.

In 1950 Leo returned to Kelly-Miller as equestrian director and served in that job for the next two seasons.

During the winter of 1951-52 he began organizing and building his new show that would use the Tiger Bill Wild West title. It was framed in his home town of Waelder, Texas, located a short distance from Gonzales, winter quarters of Ben Davenport. During the same time Leo was readying his new Tiger Bill show Davenport was fixing up his own motorized show for the 1952 season using a new title, Wallace Bros., replacing the former name Campa Bros. Leo obtained a lease of some stock from Davenport and possibly some physical equipment.

Well known circus historian Tom Parkinson has provided extensive information on the 1952 Tiger Bill show. In 1952 Parkinson was circus editor of the *Billboard* and in the spring made a tour visiting several shows including Tiger Bill. Parkinson has also provided notes contemporaries sent to him at the time Leo Snyder had his show on the road. Some of these details differ somewhat, but do provide generally a good look at the short lived show.

The first public notice of the new show came in the form of an advertisement in the January 5 *Billboard* which read: "Wanted for Tiger Bill's Wild West. Promoter and phone men for indoor circus to start at once and for the coming season. Cowboys, cowgirls and Indians, with stock. Side show and pit



show complete. Others write. All address Tiger Bill, Waelder, Texas."

We have found no clarification for the use of "indoor circus" unless Leo did indeed plan to start the season early playing indoors and later going to an outdoor arena format. In any event nothing further was mentioned about the indoor angle.

The March 1 *Billboard* carried another ad. In this one he wanted a promoter and phone men to start at once and get paid every night. He also wanted a cook, pie car operator, Indians and working men in all departments. He said the show was to open March 21.

Tiger Bill opened as scheduled March 21 in Waelder and the following day began a route of Texas stands, playing Schulemburg, El Campo, Pasadena, Hempstead, Brenham, Huntsville and Crockett.

The *Billboard* did not publish an opening day review. First notice came in the April 5 issue which was headed "Tiger Bill wins good business at El Campo." The article said the show played to near capacity for the

The Tiger Bill route card pictured Leo Snyder and his two sons. Circus World Museum collection.

Stock semi of the Tiger Bill show in McGehee, Arkansas. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.

night show at El Campo on March 24. The matinee drew a three-quarter house. The new show was under the auspices of the fire department and advance ticket sale was reportedly strong. Merchants bought tickets for distribution to customers. A final note said the show's seating capacity was estimated at about 900, and advance sales exceeded the capacity.

Notes in Parkinson files say the show was owned by Leo Snyder and with him were his two sons and their families. His son Leon was often billed as Tex Leon. There were about twenty performers on the show, including three Mexicans and six Indians. Rube Ray was there with his family of four, including daughter Barbara, now married to Buckles Woodcock. Rube did the clowning in the show. Tex Cooper and the Bluebonnet Boys Hillbilly band provided music.

Tommy Randolph listed the performance at the beginning of the season as follows: Spec, quadrille on horses (8); dogs and monkeys; rope spinning; clowns; web girl; rola-bola; ladders; trick riding; Tex Cooper and Bluebonnet boys hillbilly band in concert announcement; menage horses (3); whip act; clowns; rope horse catch; "Chase for the Bride;" concert announcement; rifle shooting by Tiger Bill; wire act; jumping horses; Roman standing high jump; clowns; "Massacre of the Covered Wagon," with four Indians and races.

The show used a traditional wild west type canopy which had been made from a Kelly-Miller big top that had been damaged in a 1951 storm. One report says the arena dimensions were 170 x 210, another at 160 x 240. As we shall later learn the canopy could be tailored to fit any lot or anticipated size crowd. In the center of the arena two tall prop poles were erected to hang rigging for the web and ladder numbers.

Seating consisted of seven high planks (blues type). One visitor noted thirty lengths of seating, another

1952 — OFFICIAL ROUTE — No.			
PERMANENT ADDRESS WAELDER, TEXAS			
DATE	TOWN	STATE	MILES
APR. 18	McGEHEE	ARKANSAS	14
APR. 19	GOULD	ARKANSAS	27
APR. 21	STAR CITY	ARKANSAS	17
APR. 22	ENGLAND	ARKANSAS	52
APR. 23	HAZIN	ARKANSAS	47
APR. 24	DES ARK	ARKANSAS	20

ALLOW ENOUGH TIME TO REACH
POINTS NAMED BEFORE DATES GIVEN

TOTAL
MILEAGE



The Tiger Bill air calliope truck. The canopy is in background. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.

counted only 26. Reportedly, half were for general admission, the other for reserves. The latter assumed to be those better positioned to view the arena. as photos indicate no chairs or star-backs were used.

There were approximately fifteen show owned vehicles, consisting of semis, straight bed trucks and trailers. All rolling stock was very attractively painted in white and lettered in red or blue. Several of the living trailers were also painted in the show's color scheme and lettered. All in all the physical appearance of the Tiger Bill show on the lot was excellent.

One rolling stock inventory read as follows: Office; power stakedriver-tractor combination; side show trailer; bandstand trailer (also carried the covered wagon); cook-house-pie car; concession trailer and air calliope truck used for downtown bally. Also there were at least two semis used for transporting horses, plus a semi to load seats, canopy and arena props.

Tiger Bill leased the side show to Happy and Marie Loter who furnished all of the attractions. The side show used a fifty foot

The side show and bannerline on the Tiger Bill midway. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.

round top with two thirty foot middles. It was fronted by a canvas bannerline.

One report stated that the show had a 60 x 40 tent to house the stock and other animals, but another omitted this from the list of tentage. Photos do not picture such a tent but one could have been in use, especially during the early part of the season.

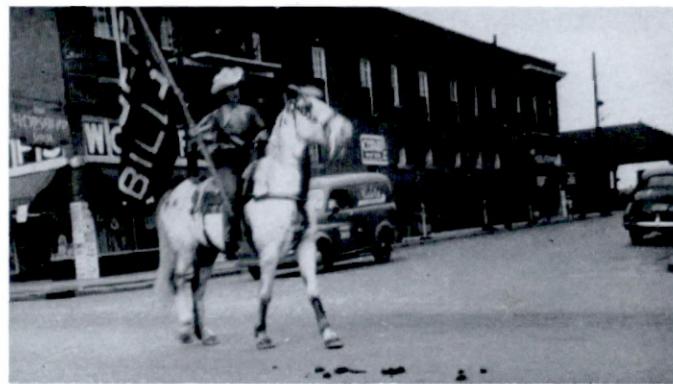
The show used auspices but most dates were only for lot and license. Telephone promotion was used in only one of seven towns due to lack of adequate advance personnel. Very little billing was observed.

Two accounts agree the show carried twenty-five horses and a few mules, but had no steers, bison or other wild west type stock.

After the initial eight days in Texas the route is unknown until it played Greggton on April 1 followed by Mount Pleasant, Texarkana and New Boston. Texarkana was a two day stand on the 3rd and 4th.

The show made a Sunday run moving into Louisiana for two days in Shreveport on April 7 and 8.

Hardy O'Neal saw the show on the lot in Shreveport and caught the performance the second night. He said the small arena was packed as it was for the other three shows. It was presented under the auspices of the local police. The backside of the arena was open and the tent canopy covering the seats was flexible and could be curved to fit any crowd



Cowgirl with Tiger Bill banner leads the street parade in McGehee, Arkansas. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.

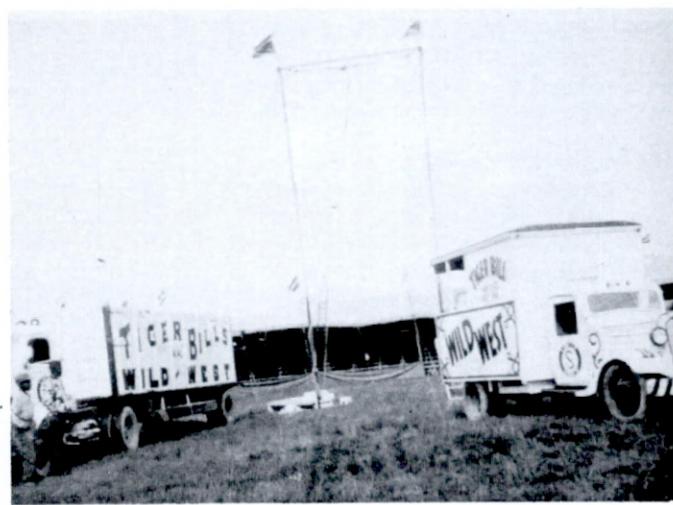
or lot. Snyder told Hardy, "we can pull out that canvas to give more flash."

Leo, "Tiger Bill," sat at a card table in the center of the arena and with his script and a microphone directed and announced the performance. The music was a four piece western guitar band. The musicians were on a flat bed two-wheel trailer and they remained standing and playing through the entire performance.

Hardy said at the time he wrote Tom Parkinson and noted that "the performance was one that could have been given at any ranch on any Saturday afternoon."

Before the show Hardy talked at length with Happy and Marie Loter who told him they had a contract with Tiger Bill to furnish a side show. The Loters had years of experience in show business, much of it with small outfits, circuses and carnivals, including two car shows. Happy once had his own two car show which toured the south and southwest and related to Hardy many interesting experiences.

Lot view of Tiger Bill in McGehee, Arkansas. An equipment semi and air calliope truck are in foreground. The aerial rigging poles are in the center. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.



riences with it. Often they would furnish side shows, as they did on the Tiger Bill show. Marie recalled she would be in every act except the last one when the boss came in and threw knives.

Hardy drew a sketch showing the arrangement of the arena in Shreveport. The canopy covering the seats was arranged somewhat in the shape of a "C" with a long straight section of seats just past the entrance with additional seats extending forward for a short distance at each end. As this article was being prepared Hardy made a search of the 1952 Shreveport newspaper files at the time of the show's appearance. He found nothing, neither advertisements or readers. He does feel sure the show did post some paper to publicize its appearance.

Several stands following Shreveport are unknown. The show was in Arkansas at El Dorado on April 14, Dermott the 17th and McGehee the 18th. Tom Parkinson visited the show in McGehee and filed two stories in the *Billboard*, appearing in the May 3 issue.

Both articles are most interesting and informative. Since there was so little concerning the Tiger Bill show that season published in the trade publications both of these articles will be fully quoted here.

The first was headed: "Tiger Bill's Wild West adds daily street parade." The story read: "Tiger Bill's Wild West show has added a street parade to its regular schedule and give its first march here on Friday (18). Tiger Bill Snyder said he planned to give parades in all but the largest towns on his route.

"In the line-up here were cowboys, cowgirls, Indians, covered wagon, two chariots, clowns and a sound car. A calliope is to be included but it was temporarily out of order here. Another truck will be equipped with sound system and will carry the western band as a parade feature.

"Red Rumble, with Kelly-Miller the past several seasons, has taken over as agent for the Tiger Bill show. The outfit is making a number of larger spots with telephone promotion and plays between one and two weeks of smaller spots between them. Lot and license auspices are arranged in the smaller towns.

"Business with the opera has been only fair, with promotion towns as the winners. Schools are being dismissed at most spots for the matinees and a near capacity house was on hand for the afternoon show in Dermott, but the matinee in McGehee was called off.

"Snyder said that as a result of the show's experiment in playing Shreveport, Louisiana, it would be booked into larger cities frequently. The show won four big houses in two days at Shreveport and also did well at El Dorado.



Personnel bus on the Tiger Bill Wild West show. Circus World Museum collection.

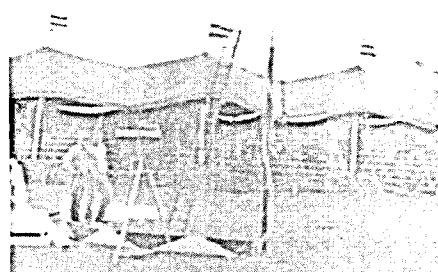
"The show is getting out more paper than when it opened a month ago. Tack cards are used liberally and daubs also are being posted. Pictorial is being prepared and a herald will be used.

"Snyder said that he had planned a street parade from the first but has postponed it until now. He said he anticipates adding a clown band or bagpiper, a buffalo and other features later."

Tiger Bill's statement that he had planned a street parade from the start is most interesting. If he had done so then he would have been credited with the revival of the street parade as his opening was a couple of weeks before King Bros.-Cristiani Circus opened its season and the wildly heralded "rebirth of the daily circus parade." The immediate success of the King-Cristiani march may have convinced Snyder to delay his parade no longer. However, it was known among the circus fraternity that the Tiger Bill show wasn't doing very well, and Leo Snyder decided he needed some drastic action to perk up business, hence the introduction of the parade at McGehee almost a month into the season.

The second *Billboard* article also dated McGehee was headed: "Wild west woe,

The Tiger Bill arena and canopy showing one of the rigging poles used for the web and ladder acts. Pfening Archives.



show printers out of paper." It read: "It's no easy matter to bill a wild west show, according to Tiger Bill Snyder. Since the opening of the Tiger Bill's Wild West, first to hit the road in several years, he has found that no stock paper for wild west shows is available.

"Plates and left over paper from the dozens of wild wests which tramped in the past were scrapped when show printers were asked to turn in paper and metal during the war. Snyder said his search turned up only a few copies of an 8 sheet. Rodeo paper is available but Snyder said it is not what he wants for a wild west show. Paper of the 101 Ranch which survived the scrap drive was used up in 1946 by the Jimmy Woods show.

"To fill the shortage, Snyder has found a page from a lithographed herald of the Pawnee Bill Wild West and he's having it reproduced for Tiger Bill in half, one, three and eight sheets."

Parkinson has provided his recollections of his circus trip and in particular the visit to Tiger Bill in the spring of 1952. He writes: "It was 1952 and the *Billboard* agreed to my going off on a circus searching trip. My wife, Margaret, went along. Every stop was an adventure. First, it was Howes Famous Hippodrome in Kentucky and very cold weather, a few grifters and fewer customers. Tiger Bill was next-in Arkansas. Then Kelly-Miller in awful mud in Texas, Cole & Walters in Oklahoma, Capell Bros. in Kansas and Howard Y. Bary's British African Zoo Train in Kansas. There were other stops, like Bill Hames quarters (Texas) to see the old 101 Ranch Wild West wagons he had-and there was still a wooden flat.

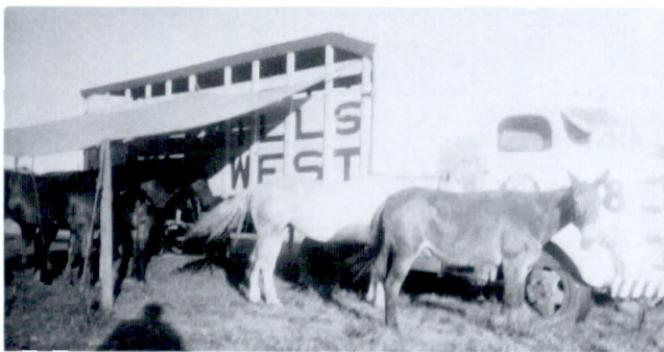
"We get to McGehee, Arkansas in mid-morning and found the Tiger Bill show set up near town. I recall wanting very much to see the wild west canopy top, and it was there. Also a side show top and banner line. Marie Loter had the side show.

"Of course, Leo Snyder, Tiger Bill, himself was there. I had known him earlier when he was on Dailey Bros. and Kelly-Miller with the concerts. Also present were his two sons and their families. The only other name that comes to mind now was that of Ruben Ray, who was clowning.

"There is nothing more tragic to see than such a show in deep financial trouble. I had seen some in the Great Depression years, when business for them was weak. Certainly this Tiger Bill show was in the same tragic class.

"They just had no money. There was no feed for the people that day; they fed only the horses and other stock. People were tense, it seemed to me. There was to be a street parade, so one of Tiger Bill's sons was fixing a wheel on the covered wagon, literally with bailing wire, to hold the steel tire on the wooden wheel.

"Then came the parade. We went to town



Tiger Bill Wild West stock truck no. 18. Pfening Archives.

to stand on the curb, and take 8 mm movies of the parade. It was mainly a single file of mounted people, cowboys and Indians. There was the covered wagon, and Rube Ray brought up the rear aboard a tractor promoted locally as a banner sale. There were some people standing with us on the curb.

"A little later we went back to the lot. We bought tickets, talked a little more with Marie Loter and stood around the marquee.

"But no one else turned up. No one came. We were the only two customers. So they blew the matinee. I didn't get to see the performance, because we had to move on. I don't recall whether we learned it before the parade, but I think it was after that we learned that one of Tiger Bill's sons and his wife were leaving the show that afternoon. It was a tough time. I don't recall anything more I might have known about the route or business, except that business was bad.

"Back at the *Billboard* office, I heard from Tiger Bill a few times. He indicated his greatest need was for an agent. I think now that he had few if any towns booked much in advance at this stage."

Parkinson concluded his account by noting that at some later time which he has not been able to pin down, he and his family were driving south on U.S. 51 heading for Decatur, when in the middle of Blooming-

The covered wagon was the only vehicle in the Tiger Bill Wild West parade in McGehee, Arkansas on April 18, 1952. Tom Parkinson photo in author's collection.



ton, Illinois he realized he was behind a convoy of show trucks and house trailers. He remembers: "I can't be sure how many, maybe five or six. And I recognized it as Tiger Bill and his family. I can't say that any of the trucks were from the earlier show. These were stock

trucks and the like. The convoy stopped in Bloomington and we stopped to say hello. I think it was then that I learned he was heading for Florida and the land he owned around Naples. Apparently, he would quit show business."

The show's route card listing McGehee indicates Tiger Bill continued with five additional Arkansas stands, Gould on April 19, (27 miles); Star City, 21, (17 miles); England, 22, (52 miles); Hazen, 23, (47 miles) and Des Are, 24, (20 miles).

The route then becomes lost, except that it is known Tiger Bill continued on through Arkansas playing Jonesboro, then moving into Missouri with Poplar Bluff a known stand. Finally sometime in late May the show was in Illinois. Sig Bonhomme joined some place along the route but his position on the show is unknown. He was well known and had performed in big top performances and in the side show.

In the *Billboard*'s final review of the 1952 season it was noted that April saw considerably bad weather in the southwest and areas Tiger Bill was showing which resulted in business being off for all shows there. It was mentioned that Kelly-Miller opened in rain and the third day out was lost to mud. Kelly-Morris, Hagen Bros., Stevens Bros., Cole & Walters, Wallace Bros. and Tiger Bill all were in the same area and suffered from opposition as well as inclement weather.

Virtually nothing appeared in the *Billboard* concerning Tiger Bill for several weeks. Finally the June 14 issue said that the show had played several Illinois stands. It was at Flora, May 28; Centralia on Decoration Day, May 30 and Brownstown on June 4.

Also it was mentioned that Red Rumble had left the show as general agent. No replacement was given.

The finish for Tiger Bill came at Galesburg, Illinois on June 17. The July 6 *Billboard* reported the closing with a piece headed: "Tiger Bill folds after 3 months

of poor business." The story said that the Tiger Bill show closed at Galesburg, on June 17, after about three months of poor business. The show had a succession of agents and it was reported it would have continued on the road if another could have been obtained. The story noted that some of the Tiger Bill personnel, including the son of the owner, Leon Snyder and his wife, Kitty, and Sig Bonhomme joined Rogers Bros. Circus in Illinois. It was reported some of the stock was returned to Ben Davenport. The equipment moved from Galesburg and presumably returned to the show's Waelder, Texas quarters. A later report indicated some of the equipment was stored in Galesburg.

Continuing, the *Billboard* said the show played few winning dates. Many matinees were cancelled for lack of patrons. The show used little billing and played percentage auspices in small towns and promotion auspices in larger spots. It opened in Texas during March and did little business in Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas except at Shreveport and El Dorado, which were good money makers. Jonesboro, Arkansas, Poplar Bluff, Missouri and Centralia, Illinois were among promotion stands made by the show.

Early season 1952 was unkind to several shows other than Tiger Bill. Stevens Bros., operated by Robert (Little Bob) Stevens, closed at Barnard, Missouri in late June. That show had poor business all season long and had narrowly averted folding several times during the season. Howes Famous Hippodrome, operated by the Sturmaks, closed in Minnesota. It was the last hurrah for what had begun as Biller Bros. in 1949 with all new equipment.

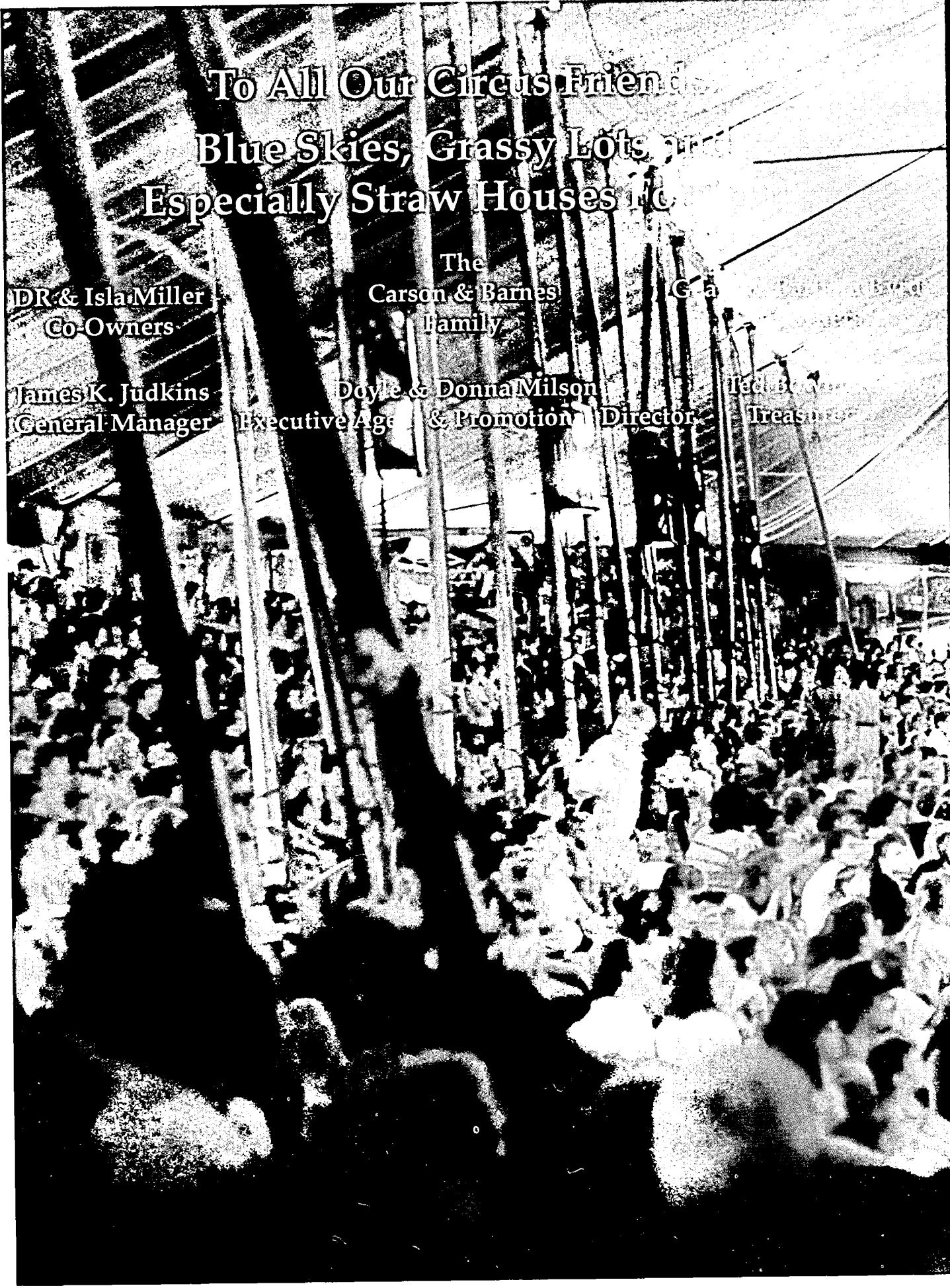
After the Galesburg blow-up Tiger Bill himself left to join Ben Davenport's Wallace Bros. Circus as equestrian director.

The November 1 *Billboard* had an article with a story originating in Galesburg, Illinois, stating that Snyder reportedly would pick up the equipment of his Tiger Bill Wild West show which was stored in Galesburg and take it south probably to Louisiana for a winter tour. It was noted this equipment had been in storage since the show folded in June. A final note said Snyder completed the season as equestrian director of Wallace Bros. His son, Leon (Tex) Snyder who finished out the season in charge of the concert on Rogers Bros. would join his father in the operation of the winter show.

It is doubtful if any such winter tour ever took place, at least no indication of such ever appeared in the *Billboard*.

Tiger Bill went on the road in 1953 as general superintendent of Kelly-Miller. This is the last reference to Leo Snyder while still in show business in the Circus World Museum files, which are quite complete on him.

I would like to thank Hardy O'Neal, Tom Parkinson and the Circus World Museum for help on this article.



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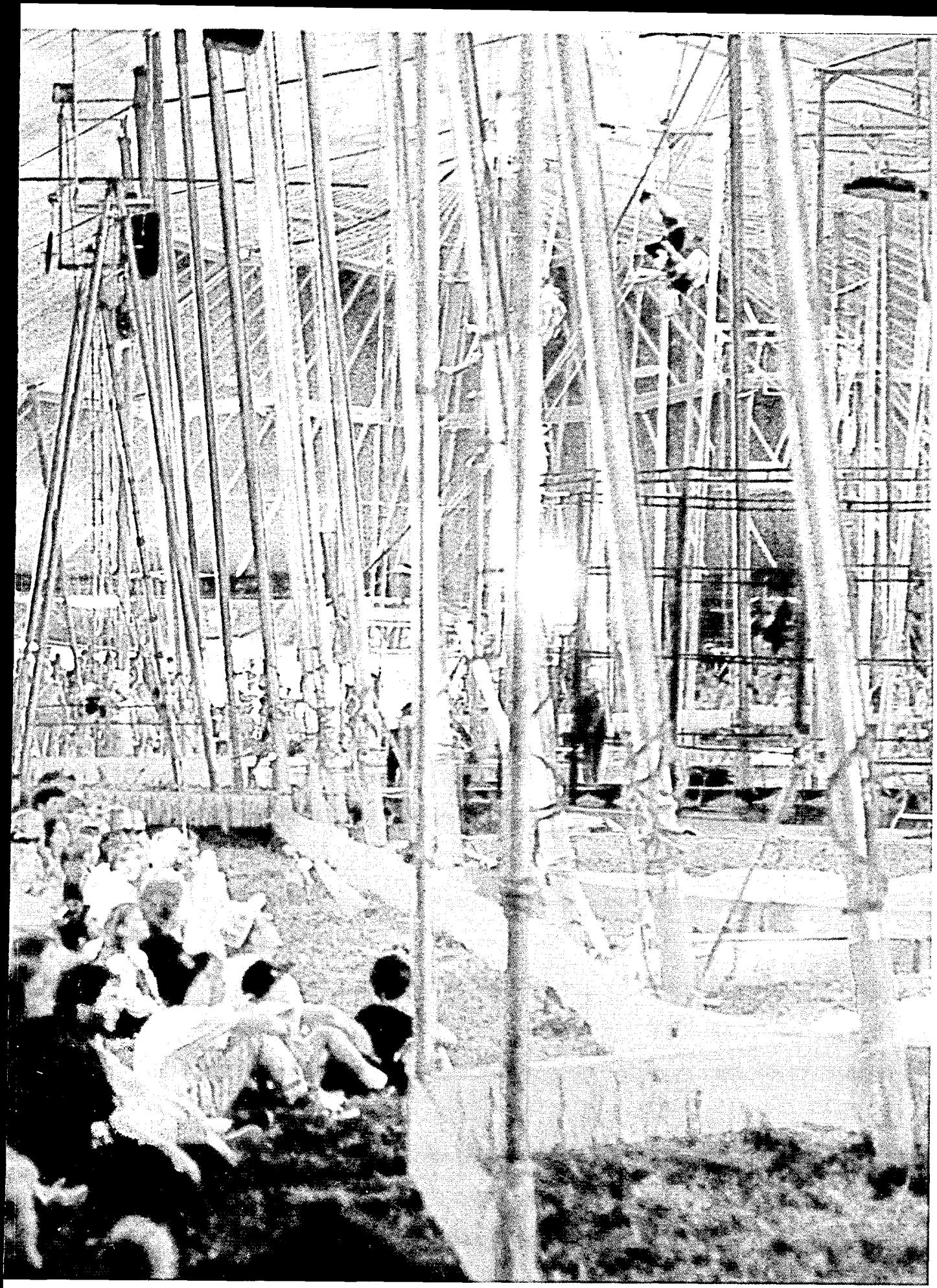
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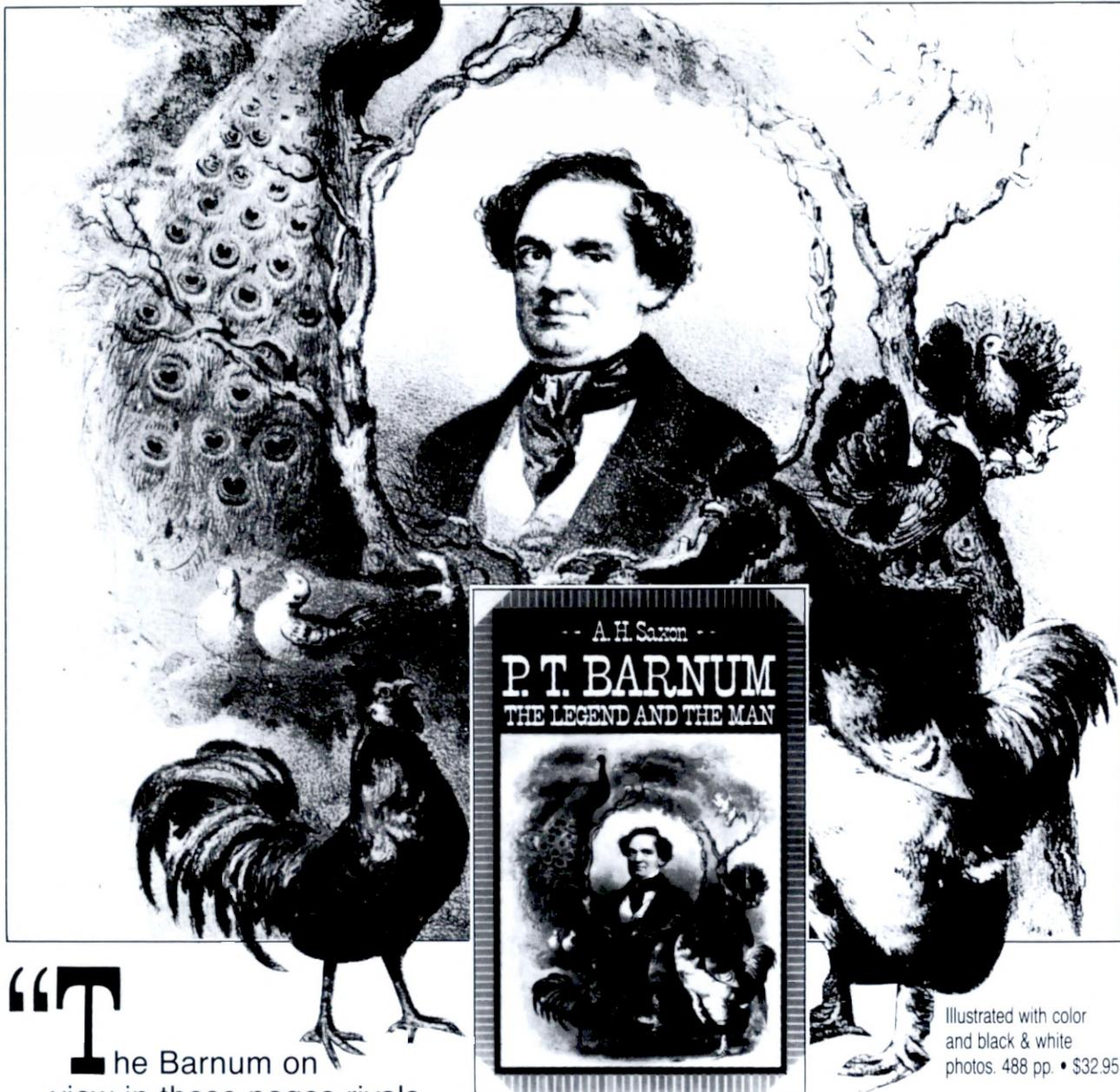
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HAPPY HOLIDAYS



LIFE IN A CIRCUS TOWN

Walt Graybeal's Bloomington

BY STEVE GOSSARD

Walt Graybeal rises about 6:30 most mornings. His joints ache, mostly his knee and hip joint. "The legs are the first to go," he says. About a year ago he suffered a few dizzy spells. Walt went in for a physical examination and his doctor told him that he had high blood pressure and a mild case of emphysema. He quit smoking but the blood pressure medicine which he began taking gave him a nagging cough. Sometimes you just can't win. But for all of that, Walt is in pretty good shape for his age. He enjoys playing golf on weekends when weather permits. Walt was very athletic in his younger days.

Walt goes directly to work each morning (he never eats breakfast) at Fey's Electronics on Morrissey Drive where he has worked for the past fourteen years as business manager. He is glad that the past few winters have been mild. Walt doesn't like to shovel snow. He is seventy-five years old.

But this paper is not about Walt's experiences at Fey's Electronics, nor about his work as a professional photographer, as a salesman of gymnastic equipment, appliances, or class rings. It is not about the motorcycle shop which he operated, either, though all of these experiences might have made for interesting stories in themselves. This story is about an earlier career. Few people who bring their televisions and VCRs to Fey's Electronics for repairs realize that the fellow behind the counter once thrilled thousands of spectators as an outstanding trapeze performer.

FAMILY LINEAGE

About 90 years ago William and Nancy Graybeal sold their farm in Laurel County, Kentucky and headed for Bloomington, Illinois. "My grandfather sold a farm off to a guy that built a blacksmith shop and he had a cane press and he made sorghum. . . . My grandfather started out of Kentucky when my father was young. Their youngest child was just a baby. And he was headed for Bloomington. He'd heard about the lush crops and fine land here in McLean County. So he headed up here to do something, but the old boy never made it. He . . . kind of went bad at Sidney, Illinois. No more food for the kids and no money to buy it. He stopped and camped outside . . . Sidney, and I don't know, they boiled some water and

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whatever they had to make stew or something. Some old people name of Crump came out of their camp and visited with them and brought them food. And they hung around for a day or two, and by god they made Grandpa the constable of Sidney, Illinois . . . and so that's where he settled. . . . And my oldest uncle was an educated man. He started teaching school. He taught school around Sidney.

"The next uncle became a telegraph operator for the Wabash Railroad. My dad, he went to Urbana, became a car inspector for the New York Central Railroad, and . . . before it was all over with, four out of five boys worked for the railroads. And old Grandpa hung around Urbana, worked for the University of Illinois in the old men's gym, and finally bundled up my grandma and went back to Kentucky and built another couple of farms and sold them off. That was what he did all his life . . . go out and buy land and clear it . . . make a few acres tillable so you can make a living, and sell it off. Build a house and a barn. Interesting days. I loved it. Pioneer days, that's what I loved about it."

Walt Graybeal, flying trapeze performer extrodinaire. Author's collection.

Walt's father, Chester Graybeal, left Sidney and hired on with the Pennsylvania and Erie Railroad at Urbana. There he married Tina Wintress Clark, and Walter was born in November of 1913. When Walt was nine years old the small family moved to 1026 W. Taylor Street in Bloomington. "On account of the railroad we moved up here. Have you heard of the 1922 strike, railroad strike? Well, Dad was involved in that. He was kind of a business manager and griever for the . . . Brother-

hood of Railway Carmen. And, uh, I think in all strike situations certain situations come up . . . if Dad had stayed in Urbana it wouldn't have been healthy for him. So, a job came open here in Bloomington, he decided to bid on it, and took it. We moved over here."

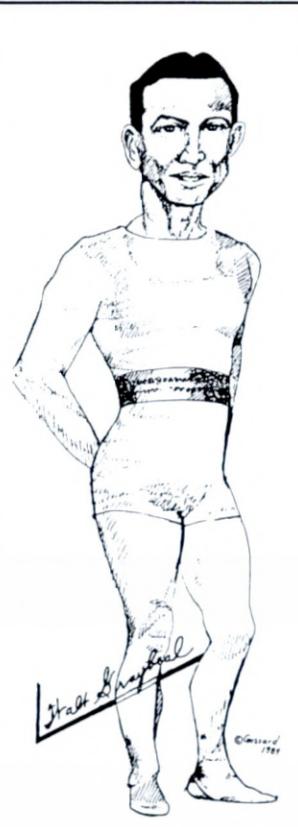
THE YMCA CIRCUS

In the early 1900s circus performers began using the Bloomington YMCA facilities for practice. The city was already becoming well known for its outstanding trapeze performers. At some time during this period a permanent trapeze rigging was built into the gymnasium at the "Y." This was a typical rigging for a "flying return act," in which a "flyer" or "leaper" swings on a trapeze from a pedestal board, to be caught by a "catcher," who swings head downward from another trapeze, called a "catchbar" or "catch trap."

The flyer turns a trick to the catcher, and returns.

"The 'Y' rigging was hung on the girders," Walt tells us. "The flybar crane had the rigging between two girders, had big steel girders for the roof. It was a simple arrangement, two tubes goin' between the two girders with the crane bar located the proper distance from the catch trap. And then the catch trap had to have a little riggin' that they dropped. You know your catchbar is lower than your flybar crane, and they had to rig that for the catchbar, but other than that there wasn't anything [different or difficult about it].

"The reason for the difference in height between the crane bars was the height of the trick bein' done should always come down to the catcher. And if they were level it would be awful hard to get way up here and maintain that height over





The Bloomington, Illinois YMCA building. Author's collection.

the catcher. So, to make sure you did, why, they had a little lower catch bar level." The rigging at the "Y" was lower than usual. "I think there was only something like twenty-five feet from the riggin' down to the floor. By the time you got the net up and grabbed a hold of the flybar and swung off a lot of times you'd drag toes in the net. Some would and some wouldn't. I did a lot." Walt was five foot, ten inches tall, which was unusually tall for a flyer. At the "Y" Circus, "they had bleachers [on the main floor]. I forgot where they got 'em, Bloomington High School or someplace like that." Most of the seating, however, was along the indoor track mezzanine level or in the balcony. The trapeze rigging covered the entire length of the gym. The net was folded out for the flying act. "The flyin' act was the last act of the show. And so, it was left up for tomorrow morning's practice, and at noon they tore it down again. And that's the way it went. The property hands put the net up [for the 'Y' performance]."

Between 1909 and 1915 Bloomington's professional circus performers presented four winter circus performances at the YMCA, organized by director, Lloyd E. Eyer. The performers always donated their services in appreciation of the use of the facilities there. So far as is known, the YMCA did not present a circus performance between 1915 and 1924. In 1924 the "Y" Circus performance was held in the Illinois Wesleyan University Gymnasium. Walt took part in the performance that year. "There was a little wand act where we had little horses hanging by suspenders and run around doin' drills. And that was at Wesleyan Gymnasium. And I think the next year or so, that was when I did contortions." Walt joined of his own initiative. His parents were not involved. "In fact, my mom was sort of dead set against it . . . but being there with the circus, seein' the flyin' act, well, that aroused my interest." This was the only year that the Wesleyan gym was used.

Thereafter circus performances were pre-

sented annually over the next 18 years. Walt probably participated in the "Zouave Drill" in the 1925 circus, and in 1926 he was featured doing a solo contortion routine in the same display as the "Aerial Ladders" routine. "In the pool one day somebody yelled at Red Sleeter and said, 'Hey Red, look what he can do!' I had my legs up behind my head, and Red said, 'Can you do that?' 'YEAH,' so I went through my routine, and let's see, there was Red, and Art Concello, and Elden Day and I, we used to entertain for various clubs around here, the Elks and Eagles and all those. And anyway, come the 'Y' Circus, C. D. [Curtis] built a box about that big, cube, about 18 inches, maybe two feet. I was a little guy . . . and the lid to it was hinged. I'd get on it and get down and hook my legs over my shoulders. I don't imagine I was no bigger'n that all the way around, and they closed the box up around me and they'd carry me to the center of the gym where they had a rotary table. They set me on it. When the girls in the ladder act started work, why they knocked on the side of the box, and I busted out and the box popped open . . . magic. And I did four or five routines, contortions. I wasn't very old. I was just twelve, maybe . . . I wasn't very big . . . probably four-and-a-half feet, something like that. Wasn't very much." Walt's contortions consisted of "twisting myself into various shapes," hooking his legs behind his head and walking around on his hands, standing flat-footed and bending over until his torso extended between his legs to wave at the audience from this curious position, etc.

It was Eldred "Red" Sleeter who organized the "Arab" tumbling act, "Hassen Ben Hosen." Elden Day, Wayne Larey, Harold "Tuffy" Genders and Art Concello all worked with this tumbling act at various times. These athletes all joined the famous Flying Wards troupe later on and became outstanding professionals. C. D. Curtis was a physical education director at the YMCA, and was one of the most active organizers of the "Y" Circus in those years.

Over the next few years Walt spent a great deal of time at the "Y" often skipping school to watch the professionals practice. He was inspired to become a performer from the first, though his mother disapproved in the beginning. "Haven't you heard [about the] evil people in circus business? Eventually she came around. She came around pretty quickly." Later,

when Walt was working with various flying acts, his family came to watch him whenever they could. Did trapeze work come easy for him? "No, I was just so set on doin' it . . . I just did it." Most of Walt's early training was under the direction of the Valentine brothers, George and Fred, at the YMCA.

George Valentine had broken in as a catcher for Harry LaMar's troupe in the mid 1920s. He worked with the Flying Sullivans in 1928 or 1929, and with Art and Antoinette Concello's flying act their first year out in 1930. George broke his brothers, Fred, Roy and Bill, into the business as well, and in 1933 he formed his own distinguished troupe, the Flying Valentines.

By the time Walt "joined out" he was already able to complete a double somersault to a hand catch, a fairly difficult trick for a 17 year old performer. He was recruited by one of the pioneers of the trapeze in America, Harry (Pappy) LaVan.

THE FLYING LAVANS 1930-1933

The Green farm in the 1870s was located at McClun and Croxton Streets, in the vicinity of today's Hundman Lumber mart. Harry Green's oldest brothers, Fred and Howard, entered the circus profession in about 1877, calling themselves the "LaVan Brothers." The LaVans were said to have been the first act in the country to perform a "passing act" or "flying bar act." This type of trapeze act consisted of two trapeze and two pedestal boards. The flyers swung off from the pedestal boards at opposite ends of the rigging,

The Flying LaVans, Tom Kitchen, Amy LaVan and Harry LaVan (Green), on Barnum & Bailey in 1908. Pfening Archives.



turned tricks in the air, and exchanged trapeze bars in the process. This act was a forerunner to the flying return act.

Howard was injured in 1880 and Fred continued working with other partners. Harry's father discouraged his circus aspirations. When he discovered that Harry had improvised a rigging for a bar act in the rafters of the barn he dismantled the contraption and forbade Harry from practicing again. Harry ran away with the circus in 1883. In 1889 he and Fred formed an act together which they once again called the LaVan Brothers.

Harry continued presenting his stationary bar act and passing act on the stage and under canvas after Fred retired in 1885, with various partners, and soon his wife Amy was working in the act as well. In time, Harry would expand his troupe and build a double wide rigging to make a very impressive performance. Through the 1920s the Flying LaVans worked primarily at parks and fairs, and sometime before Walt Graybeal joined the troupe in 1930 Harry converted the foremat to a flying return act.

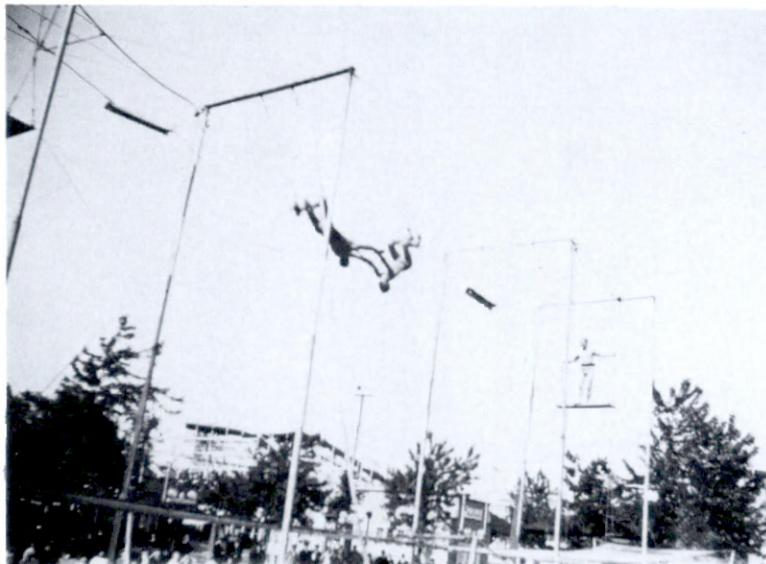
"Pappy" LaVan was already 63 years old when Walt became part of the Flying LaVans, yet he had only just quit working as a flyer a year or two before. When Walt joined Harry was catching for the troupe from what is known as a "catch Cradle." Harry began breaking in the Croutcher brothers, Irwin "Bosco" and Clarence "Kayo" and Robert "Bones" Brown.

To heard Walt tell it, Pappy simply grew tired of watching him hang around the "Y" all the time, and offered him a job. Walt dropped out of school to join the troupe. Walt didn't receive his high school diploma until 1952 when he took a proficiency exam. In those days the LaVans were using the YMCA facilities for practice. Pappy was usually on hand to teach young people at the "Y." "I always used to respect his ability to help them out," Walt says. But Pappy also told Walt of earlier indoor practice sites. He had practiced in an ice house. "There were two or three ponds [where ice houses were located]. Bevins Pond was one of them, and I think that was it. And they had an ice house on it. They set ice every winter. And then Houghton's Lake had an ice house, too. I don't know if Pappy practiced there or not. I never practiced at either of them." Harry told him that they assembled the bar rigging in the rafters of the ice house and fell into the sawdust piles.

When the weather was good they prac-

ticed at Bongo Park. The Flying LaVans drove out to the park in Pappy's pickup truck. "We practiced morning and afternoon."

About Bongo Park, Walt relates, "My first recollections it was Houghton's Lake. Well, old man Houghton hauled in a bunch of sand, and built an open air ballroom, and had pretty good amusements out there. Confectionery under the roof and all that kind of stuff. George Goforth and Ralph Bonnie bought it from him. It later became Circus Night Club when Bert Doss got it. Bert Doss, whose boyhood home was on Colton Avenue, just around the corner from the Ward barn on Emerson, had been with the Flying



The Flying LaVans in 1925 using an unusual two pedestal rigging. Pfening Archives.

Wards, the Flying Thrillers, and the Flying Bertons. He entered into partnership with Gene Enos in 1936 to operate the Circus Nigh Club. Gene had performed a perch act and rolling globe walking act from 1909 until 1933, when his wife, Mary, died. Gene continued for some years working as eques-trian director for circuses.

When asked to describe Pappy LaVan, Walt states that Harry was about five foot, six inches tall, a nice looking fellow, but with an unusual build. "He was all belly. Heavy hips. That was just his build and that was it." Did Harry have black or brown hair? "Bald hair," Walt says, "when I knew him. What hair he did have was grey." Walt recalls watching Pappy wax his moustache and roll the ends in toilet paper before turning in for the night.

When Walt knew Pappy and his wife Amy they were living in an apartment on East Jefferson. "The depression come along and several of the banks he had money in failed, so he just didn't have much to go on. Every years he used to have us over for one time for spaghetti." Amy was not working with

the act at the time, but Walt recalls that she mentioned having done single routines on rings and a stationary bar act.

Once one of Pappy's early partners came through town with a couple of boys doing a bar act. This was Tom Kitchen, whom Harry had worked with in the old LaVan Brothers act. Kitchen was originally from the Los Angeles area, but was now training his act out of the Chicago Athletic Club. Walt remembers him as a "crippled up" little fellow. He had been injured in a fall at one time or another.

Walt also met Gordon Lillie while working with the LaVans on Russell Bros. Circus in 1933 touring through Oklahoma. Gordon Lillie was the famous "Pawnee Bill" who had owned one of the most successful wild west shows in the country in the 1890's and early 1900s. At one time he had been partners with Bill Cody in the largest wild west show in the world, often called the "Two Bills Show." Walt describes Lillie as a short stocky fellow, "powerful looking." Lillie was born and raised in Bloomington, and Walt states that he and Pappy LaVan had been schoolmates together.

Walt married Marion Crawford "the night before our first engagement in 1930. We went to Lincoln . . . got some poor [fellow] out of bed and down at the courthouse . . . for no good reason. I can't understand [why I did it]." The marriage didn't last very long.

During his tenure with the LaVans Harry taught Walt a unique trick. The only other person able to do the "crab double" was Frank Shepherd, who was primarily known for being the most outstanding single trapeze artist in the country. Walt describes the crab double as a backward double somersault. "You're in this crab position [swinging from the flybar, chest-downward, suspended by hands and feet] and you fold through [feet first passing over your head] and then you do your somersault. Somewhere in those movies [referring to eight millimeter films held in the Museums Department at Illinois State University] is a movie of me doing one. It wasn't done very well. It was rougher than the dickens, but . . ." This was a film of the Three Aces in practice.

Besides working parks and fairs the LaVans also worked on the Russell show in 1933. Walt left the LaVans in 1934, when he joined the Flying LaMars. Pappy quit performing in 1937 and moved to New Orleans, where he opened a booking agency. "We were down there in the Three Aces in 1936. We went down for one week and he [the manager of the show] held us over for a sec-

ond. Pappy played that park the next year and that's when he stayed. And I think he quit the act and . . . Bones [Robert Brown] and Jerry Wilson and, I forget who else, took the act out for him [after that]. Then later the Three Aces broke up and Bosco went running down there and joined them." Harry Green died in New Orleans in 1952.

Walt filled in for a couple of weeks in 1933 or 1934 with the Harold Voise troupe on the Ringling-Barnum show when Harold's wife Eileen broke her thumb. Harold Voise had broken in with the Flying Melzoras in 1922. In 1924 he had been recruited with the famous Flying Wards in Bloomington, and in 1927 Harold and Bert Doss formed a partnership and left the Wards, calling themselves the Flying Thrillers with their catcher, Bob Brooks. The troupe consisted of Harold, Walt, and their catcher, Roy Deisler for the brief period when Eileen was out.

Also in 1933 or 1934 Walt filled in with Bert Doss' Flying Bertons during a few engagements when Bert needed to put together a five person flying act. Bert had been on hand from the beginning when Eddie Ward built his training barn on Emerson Street in 1915, but probably didn't break in with the flying act until after the tragic Hagenbeck-Wallace train wreck which killed Eddie's sister Jennie in 1918. As stated before, Bert and Harold had left the Wards in 1927. The troupe consisted of Bert, Walt, and Mitzi Sleeter with Red Sleeter and Bert's wife, Agnes, catching.

THE FLYING LAMARS 1934

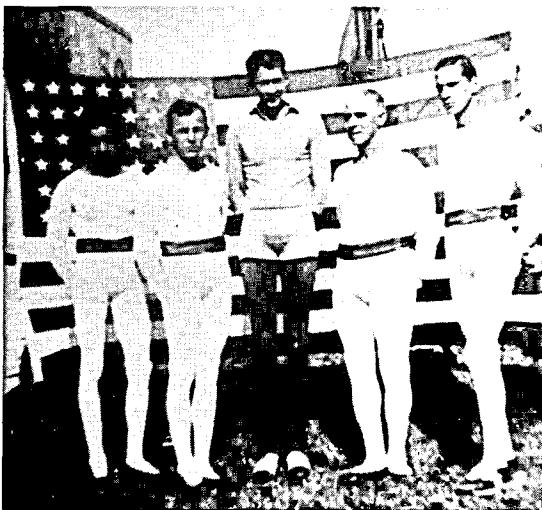
Ed Foreman entered the circus business in 1884 calling himself Ed LaMar. Little is known of his early career, but in the early 1900s he began working with Charles Noble's troupe, the Flying Fishers. When Charles died in 1908 the troupe soon split apart. Charles' brother Clyde took a Flying Fishers troupe out to tour the vaudeville circuit while Ed LaMar and Charles Waller (called Charles Fisher) continued playing circuses calling themselves the LaMar-Fisher Troupe. Later this troupe split apart as well, to form the LaMar troupe and the Flying Fishers.

Ed's nephew, Harry Foreman known professionally as Harry LaMar once told Walt Graybeal that he had broken into the business with his uncle and Toto Siegrist. It is certain that Harry worked with Clyde Noble's stage act in 1915. Harry served in the military during World War I and worked with Paul Sullivan's Flying Sullivans in 1921. At some time Ed LaMar quit the business and Harry formed a flying act of his own which he called the Flying LaMars.

The Flying LaMars was one of many troupes which used the YMCA facilities for

practice regularly. Besides being one of the most colorful characters in Bloomington's circus history, Harry was instrumental in breaking in dozens of young flyers and catchers at the YMCA.

Walt is of the opinion that there were two main reasons why Harry broke in so many trapeze performers. One reason was that he was sometimes difficult to get along with. People seldom wanted to work with him for more than one or two seasons. In justice to Harry, Walt admits that he was a bit cocky and impulsive himself in his younger days



Clarence and Irwin Croutcher, Bones Brown, Pappy LaVan and Walt Graybeal, the Flying LaMars from 1930 to 1933. Author's collection.

and his criticisms of Harry might be a bit too harsh. But compared to Pappy LaVan or Eddie Ward, Walt says, Harry really wasn't a very good teacher. "Harry couldn't teach a fly to fly. Poor old guy . . . poor old son-of-a-gun." Harry was having some troubles flying. He often balked at doing a double cut-away during a performance. Walt describes a cut-away trick as one in which the flyer swings with his back to the catcher and performs a "cut under forward" somersault. Balking during a performance was considered taboo among professionals, yet Harry could perform his trick and Walt credits Harry as being the best flyer he ever worked with. It is difficult to explain why Harry would balk. Buster Melzora, for many years the principal flyer with the Flying Melzoras, of Saginaw, Michigan, states that Harry LaMar was one of the most accomplished flyers he'd ever seen.

Perhaps Harry did not always have these problems. During the 1920s the Flying LaMars were an extremely successful troupe, making several tours of Australia and South America. It is possible that Harry had never quite gotten over the death of his fiance Velma Harvey who died from a fall into the

grandstand while working with the LaMars in Melbourne, Australia in 1928.

What kind of fellow was Harry LaMar? Walt describes him as short, about five foot six, brown hair, with a short stocky build. Harry didn't smoke or drink, however he was known to fight, gamble and chase women. This brings us to the second reason why Harry couldn't keep his people with the act. "He never did pay the whole season. What he'd do is give me a couple of bucks on the weekends to get across the road, and give me a buck every day to eat on or somethin' like that. Finally one time, I don't know why he decided to do it . . . decided to pay me off. Well, I was tickled to death. I had a little money in my pocket. Was going to send some home. Well, I hadn't even left the lot, here he was in the cookhouse playin' one arm bandits, and here he sent some guy clear down to where I was . . . wanted that money back. Sure did, so he could play those one arm bandits. Right."

When questioned about reports that Harry was "good with his fists" and quick to fight, Walt says that he had "never known Harry to start anything." So far as chasing women goes, "Harry used to have a few girls that he used to call up to work in the act. Sometimes he'd make time with them," but often as not the ladies would take up with the other fellows in the act if they were inclined towards romance. So far as that goes, Harry probably didn't have any worse reputation than Walt himself. When asked if the fellows usually bunked together on the road, Walt replies, "Not if we could help it [wink]."

Walt worked with the LaMars for one season. At the beginning of the season they worked with Francis "Gooch" Reiner as their catcher. Walt relates that when playing in "Georgia or someplace" he and Reiner "met up with" a couple of lovely young ladies. They were introduced to the girls' father, who was so impressed with the young athletes that he treated them to dinner and all the free beer that they could drink. When they returned to the lot Walt and Gooch were in a state of bliss, but Harry was distraught. How were they going to put on an evening performance with these two guys in the shape they were in? The irony of this story is that Harry missed most of his tricks that evening, and Walt caught all of his. Such occurrences were rare, however. Flying was serious business, not taken lightly.

At some point in the season Reiner "got himself hurt tearing down the riggin'." The flybar cable fell across and exposed electrical wire. Gooch was paralyzed, holding on to the cable on the ground. Harry attempted to free him, grabbing him by the legs, and was also frozen on the spot. Walt managed to release them by pulling a stake which

dropped the crane bar to let the cable loose. Reinier left the act. Walt says, "I don't know if he just wanted to loaf or what, but the doctor said, 'Oh, my, your shoulder muscles are all burnt up!' Well, I couldn't believe that to save my soul, but there it was. Well, then we had C. D. Curtis come down and help out for a while [catching] . . . uh, [Louis] Probasco came down for a week or so, and we finally got ahold of Hank Robbins and he spent the rest of the season with us. [Hank] worked for Eddie Ward as a property hand and rigger. I don't know if Eddie had him catching or not, but Harry was

with him quite a bit." Later Robbins worked with various troupes under Art Concello's management. Louis Probasco was a successful attorney, besides being an enthusiastic supporter and performer for the YMCA Circus.

Walt worked only one season with the La-Mars. He was injured practicing at the YMCA at the close of the season. "It was one of those freak accidents. The crab double, that I did NOT want to do on that stage riggin' [Clyde Noble's old stage rigging which Harry was using]. We were working vaudeville at the Majestic Theatre, and I didn't want to do that trick, but Harry insisted. Hank Robbins was catching, and as I unfolded from the crab Hank pressed up just a little too soon. My feet kicked him and stopped me right upside down in a cast position, and if you're coming down head first you're gonna' remain coming down head first. I came down on the side of my head [in the net] and my body folded over." Gracie Genders, seated in the second row of the bleachers, could hear Walt's neck crack. "The tears ran down her face," in empathy. Walt was laid up twenty-six weeks, during which time he and the Croutcher brothers built a rigging and made a net. "That was the year we started our Three Aces."

THE THREE ACES 1935-1937

By 1935 Walt and the Croutcher brothers felt self-confident enough to form their own act, the "Three Aces." They built their own rigging, having become familiar with the dimensions through repeated use. The rigging was built from press fitted and riveted steel tubing. The boys had had experience making and repairing nets at the "Y" and they spent the winter months making the net. Walt was



This large group of flyers presented the four wide trapeze act at the YMCA in 1936. Illinois State University Archives.

still wearing the neck brace as a result of his fall. Understandably enough, Walt's parents were upset about the accident. When asked if his younger brother ever expressed the desire to take up trapeze work, Walt answers, "No . . . maybe my mom had a little something to do with that. I don't know for sure." The new troupe started the season off with Walt and Bosco flying and Kayo catching.

Traveling with the flying return act playing parks and fairs was not always as glamorous as it might seem. These were depression days. People were hungry for entertainment. The work was available, but in order to make money it was necessary to be continually on the move from day to day. Maintaining the equipment was tedious. It was necessary to set up and tear down the rigging on a daily basis most often. Then it had to be checked and rechecked for safety reasons, until at times it seemed that the actual performance was only a secondary consideration. Of the big parks which he played, "I don't remember very many of 'em. Playland Park in Rye, New York was a beautiful place. Big, huge, a nice place. The Palisades in New Jersey, Ocean View in Norfolk, Virginia."

The Flying act was always accompanied with music. They used "standard waltzes. A march to get up to the riggin' and then break into a waltz, like, oh, 'Over the Waves,' and 'Skater's Waltz' and . . . I think there was another one . . . old standards. Some of it was over the public address system [as opposed to a live band], records, well, most cases outdoors, it was. Then later, in the '40s, circus bands became a little more sophisticated and started using more popular music. They had

some beautiful stuff for all the acts, all the late numbers they were using. Before Bones and I took out the Artonys we worked St. Paul, and let's see, they played 'The Girl That I Married' was one of 'em, 'Anniverserary Waltz' was another . . . anyway, it was a current popular number and they all were waltzes."

In 1936 Walt met and married his second wife, Lilly Hines, at the close of the season at Pontchartrain Beach, Louisiana. His first son, Richard, was born in August of 1937. This marriage lasted for seven years.

After two years the troupe split up over some dispute between Bosco and Kayo. "You know how brothers are," Walt says. "So, anyway, that night the Graybeal residence had company for about a week, until Bosco got himself straightened away to go to New Orleans [to join the Flying LaVans]."

THE YMCA CIRCUS OF 1936 AND 1937

Through these years Walt had participated in the "Y" Circus from time to time working as a property hand or clowning with the show. When clowning he used Emmett Kelly's makeup face. The clowning was just for fun. "I didn't have to. I just liked to do it. You'd get behind that old makeup and just lose yourself, you know?"

In 1936 the principal feature of the show was, and still remains, the largest act of its kind ever assembled. Walt took part in this performance. "There were seventeen people in that picture [publicity photo of the flying act] and that wasn't all of them, either." The act seems to have been spontaneously organized, "We were just all there, that's all," but Walt also states that C. D. Curtis was instrumental in putting the act together. On second count, the photo actually pictured sixteen people: Bones Bown, Charles Fisher, Elmo Rankin, Walt Graybeal, Oscar Foin, Bob Fisher, Herb Fleming, Harry LaMar, Kayo Croutcher, Rose Fleming, Connie Fisher, Edith Fisher, Francis Fisher, Maxine Fisher, Gracie Genders and Mitzi Sleeter.

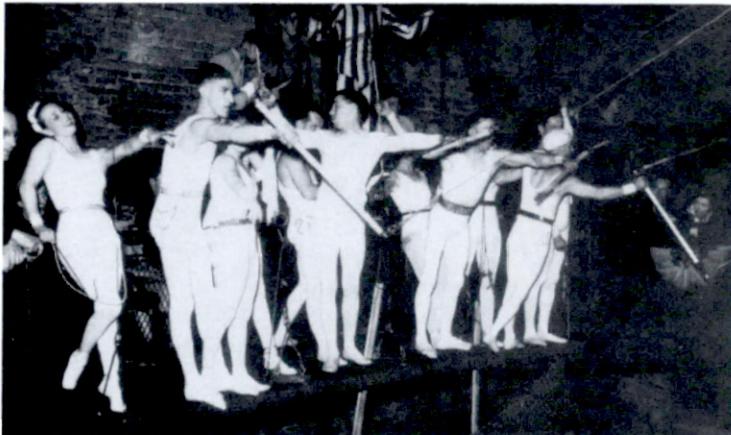
The rigging for the act was "four wide," with four catchers swinging abreast. Of course this was a much larger rigging than was normally used for practice. "Somebody just come up with the idea and they executed it, that's all. We just put it up for one show. You know, I worked out over the floor on

the east side, well, floor, right on top of the ridge rope [the edge of the net]. I could have gone either way if I missed a trick. That was a big son-of-a-gun, too [the net]. It belonged to Herb Fleming. I don't know where he got it." This might have been one of the nets used by the Flying Wards

in their big act some years before. Walt states that the catchers controlled the timing of the flyers leaping from the board so that the outside flyers swung off at the same time, the inside flyers swung off together, and the two sets of flyers passed in the process. The flying act of 1936 could be considered not only the climax of the program that year, but also the climax of the entire history of the YMCA presentations.

Practice through the winter at the YMCA went as follows: "I don't remember how many acts there was anymore. We'd start early in the morning at six o'clock. Nobody wanted to practice at six . . . so the six o'clock group went down the night before and put the net up, had it all ready for the seven or eight o'clock group. It was a chore to set up the net. That rotated every week, too. Oh, yeah, you had to tear it down at noon, 'cause you had all the businessmen comin' to play . . . shoot and, uh . . . volleyball. There was one time, we only had fifteen minute sessions, I think. There was a bunch of us down there, uh, Charlie [Fisher], Harry [LaMar], Pappy [LaVan] . . . Herb [Fleming] and later, us. I don't remember, but there was six or seven of us. Six or seven acts practiced there. Had to quit in favor of the other act coming on. Then you tore down before noon so the . . . business people could have their recreation. Then come back, fool around all afternoon [when there] wasn't anything going on. We used to put the mats out and do risley and practice everybody else's act. And then [Eddie] Billetti come to town and that's when he put his wire up, was in the afternoon. We'd all get in there and walk that blamed wire, had all afternoon to do it. We had a good time." Every evening the circus folks would congregate two blocks down at Thompson's Cafeteria on Center Street. "Always had to have a nickle for a cup of coffee. If ya' didn't have it ya' bummed it."

Walt took part in the "Y" flying act once again in 1937. The March 30 *Pantagraph* listed the personnel of the flying act: Clarence and Irwin Croucher, Walt Graybeal, Alma Fouin, Harry LaMar, Mickie Mahan,



Fliers on the four pedestal boards of the big YMCA circus act in 1936. Dennis Watson collection.

Charlie Fisher, Forrest Higginbotham, Glen Higginbotham, Connie Fisher, Elmo Rankin and Edith Fisher.

THE FLYING FLEMINGS 1937

After the Three Aces broke up, Walt tells us, "I'm kind of studying what to do and I looked out and there was Herb Fleming walking down the street. He walked in and asked me about working with him and I said, 'Fine.' So we started our season." After only two practices at the YMCA the Flying Flemings began the season playing parks and fairs."

Herb Fleming probably broke in as a catcher with Charles Waller's Flying Fishers. He was working with this act as early as 1917. He and his wife Rose joined the Flying Wards in 1923, and they worked with one of the Ward acts for several years before organizing their own troupe. Their daughter Evelyn also performed with the troupe for many years. The act in 1937 consisted of Herb, Walt and Rose. Herb is described as a large man, robust, about five foot, ten inches, with brown hair. "When the season was over I went to New Orleans to take my wife. That was her home. She had a yen to go and settle there 'cause Jerry [Wilson] wanted me to go with him."

THE FLYING BEHRS 1938-1940

Jerry Wilson had broken in as a catcher at the Chicago Athletic Club under athletic director Johnny Behr. Jerry had worked with Pappy LaVan in the early 1930s as well. Jerry managed the Flying Behrs with his brother Tim and Pierre LaFramboise as his flyers. In 1938 Tim was the principal flyer with the troupe, and their biggest trick was a one-and-a-half somersault to a hand catch. Pierre left the act and Jerry called in Walt because he was able to catch a two-and-a-half and a double full twister, as well as other smaller

tricks. Walt and Lilly bought a travel trailer and began traveling with the Behrs. In New Orleans in 1940 they picked up a young lady named Janet who had been Jerry's adagio dance partner to drop the bar for them when they returned to the pedestal board and to do other small tricks. From there the troupe traveled to the Hawaiian Islands. They worked the islands of Maui, Oahu and Hawaii.

THE FLYING LECLAIRS 1940-1942

When the Behrs finished their engagement in Hawaii Walt again joined the Croucher brothers to form a three person act, the Flying LaClaires.

They played dates along the west coast, "up and down Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana." During his career Walt toured Canada three times. He also worked southern states, but never Mexico. The majority of parks and fairs were played in eastern states. The LaClaires finally broke up for good in 1942 and Walt hired on with the Chicago and Alton Railroad in Bloomington as a road fireman. He remained with the C and A for six years. While working for the C and A he met Hazel Riddle at Roodhouse, Illinois. They were married in 1942. His second son Walter was born in September of 1943, and his son Mike was born in February of 1945. Walt and Hazel were married twenty-three years. Walt now has six grandsons, two by each of his three sons.

THE ARTONYS 1948-1949

Besides working for the C and A in 1947 or 1948 Walt was also occasionally helping Eddie Billetti in a side venture which Eddie

The Flying Artonys, Jack Bray, Walt Graybeal and Bones Brown in 1948. Author's collection.



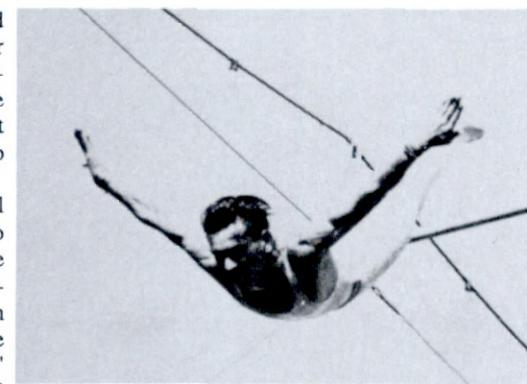
had set up to make extra money. Ed Raycraft owned and operated a used car dealership in a large building at the corner of Douglas and East Streets. He rented Eddie the entire upstairs "for next to nothing," and Eddie set up shop building riggings for aerial acts.

The Billettis were just one of several outstanding acts which were drawn to Bloomington for its extensive practice facilities. Eddie Hebler and Bill Freeman had formed their high wire act in 1931 calling themselves Bill and Eddie which immediately became "Billettis." During the 1930s and 1940s the Billettis act was one of the most outstanding high wire acts in the country. Walt states that they were *the* wire act of the Al G. Barnes and Hagenbeck-Wallace circuses in those days. The Billettis worked the YMCA Circus for many years. Walt characterizes Eddie as "a fine person."

At this time Art Concello called Walt and asked him to work with one of his flying acts, the Artonys [named for Art and Tony, of course]. Since the days of the "Hassen Ben Hosen" YMCA acrobats Art had become one of the most influential circus men in the country, with as many as nine flying acts under his management at one time. The Concellos had moved to Sarasota in 1940, but Art retained ownership of the training barn on Emerson Street which had belonged to Eddie Ward, and he used the six car garage behind his father's house on West Locust to store much of his trapeze rigging. When Art and Antoinette were in town they generally stayed at Tilden Hall.

Walt was now thirty-five years old. He had not worked with a flying act for six years. What could he say to an offer like this? "Sure, why not?" He quit his job with the railroad and began practicing with the

The Eddie Billetti high wire act performing at a Bloomington YMCA circus in the 1930s. I. S. U. Milner Library Special Collections.



Walt Graybeal. Author's collection.

Artonys at the barn on Emerson Street. Was it difficult to "get it back" after being off for so long? "No, not really," Walt says. He began the season with Bones Brown, with Jack Bray catching. They played the Tom Pack's Thrill Circus, a few ball parks and Shrine dates as well. Walt had a personality clash with Jack Bray. Jack left the act at some point and Jimmy Crocker took over as catcher. Jeannie Sleeter (daughter of Red and Mitzie) joined the troupe toward the end of the season. When Walt left the act early in 1949 Fay Alexander took his place. Fay is best known for doing the stunts for Tony Curtis in the movie, *Trapeze*. Walt worked with one more flying act before retiring for good.

THE DUWARDS

Billy Ward, a nephew of a well known circus clown, had broken in with the Flying Wards in 1927. Billy went on to form his own troupe, the Flying Duwards. About 1950 Billy was injured while working with the act. He called Walt in to work for him for a few weeks. "He sent me a bus ticket. I sent it back and said, 'I want train transportation with sleepin' accommodations.'" The troupe consisted of Walt and a girl flyer (possibly Mary Stevens) and their catcher Jim Olson. Though Walt is of the opinion that he "had no business working" at the time because he

had gained weight, Olson stated that he didn't notice the extra weight while catching Walt. This is an illustration of the skill and grace of a first class flyer. By contrast, the small, slight built, Billy Ward, "hit you like a freight train," said Olson.

In his career Walt not only mastered all the "simple" tricks like somersaults, seat rolls, seat jumps, hocksaults, hock somersaults, and the double somersault; but also more difficult tricks like the two-and-a-half and

double full twister. As mentioned before, he was one of only two people who could do a crab double. Walt even caught the "big trick," a triple somersault, in practice few times, but not often enough to put it in the act.

A PORTRAIT OF A FLYER

Walt states that "a certain degree of talent" is required to be a flyer. "Some have more than others, others have none at all for that particular thing." Certainly a fear of heights would be a handicap when working thirty feet above the ground. I asked Walt if the height ever bothered him. "Not particularly," he said. Once he'd gotten use to it he had no problems.

Is there a particular physical type which best lends itself to trapeze work? It is often stated by authoritative circus people that the best flyers were small people. In Walt's words, he wouldn't pin it down to a specific physical type. "Wayne [Larey] was very good, now he was a very slender person [five foot, nine inches or so]. Art [Concello] was super. He was a short stocky guy. So, I don't know . . . what's best or better. Now Tuffy [Genders] was a pretty good sized boy [also about five foot, nine]. He was good. Harry [LaMar] . . . was a short stocky person. Very stocky. I think maybe the short people. I don't know. Honestly, I don't."

At eleven o'clock Walt leaves the counter at Fey's Electronics and heads down Lafayette Street in his green Ford Fairlane toward Main, to the Winner's Bar and Grill, where Patty is usually tending bar in the twilight atmosphere. He has lunch every day, "two sandwiches, Scotch on rye," (actually, Scotch and soda). Here, Walt also purchases his lottery tickets for the week. His circle of friends ranges from auto mechanics and brick masons to attorneys and judges.

At five o'clock weekdays Walt leaves Fey's and again drives down Lafayette Street. He stops in at Winner's again before heading for the Elks Club. He has dinner and heads home.

In his time Walt has seen the circus tradition pass away almost completely in Bloomington. He has traveled through nearly every state in the country and met some of the most interesting people in the business. He has worked with or been associated with the greatest artists in trapeze work, some of the pioneers in that line, and enjoys a respectable reputation in his own right. He grew up in a community which fostered and encouraged these developments. Walt has seen many changes in this town. He lives in the same location, but an entirely different place. Walt and a few others still living in the community today were fortunate to have participated in those events, and we are extremely lucky to have them as links with this unique heritage.





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CIRCUS STARS OF THE 1920S PHOTOGRAPHED BY

HARRY A. ATWELL

Harry A. Atwell, a native of Chicago, was born October 4, 1879. He quit school at the age of eighteen and went to work in a steel mill. Soon his interest turned to newspaper work and he landed a job as a reporter on the *Chicago Chronicle*. After two years on the paper he took a course in photography and moved to the *Chicago InterOcean*. On that paper in 1902 he was introduced to circuses by press agents.

In 1910 Alf T. Ringling offered him a job on the Ringling show taking and selling souvenir post-

cards on a 50-50 basis. At the close of the season he returned to Chicago where he joined Frank Burke to open the Burke-Atwell News Photo Service. He remained with Burke for 14 years and then opened a circus and theatrical photo agency which he operated until the early 1950s when he retired and moved to Sarasota, Florida. His circus negatives were later purchased by the Milwaukee *Journal* and given to the Circus World Museum.

This selection of Atwell circus photos of the 1920s is from the Pfening Archives.



Col. Joseph C. Miller owner of the 101 Ranch 1925.

Mable Stark, Ringling-Barnum 1923.



Reno and Isobel McCree, Sparks 1925.

Bird Millman, on Ringling-Barnum.





May Wirth, Ringling-Barnum.



Lou Davenport, Hagenbeck-Wallace.



Madam Pallenberg, Ringling-Barnum.



Ben Hamid Arabs, 101 Ranch 1927.

Vera Bruce, Ringling 1929.

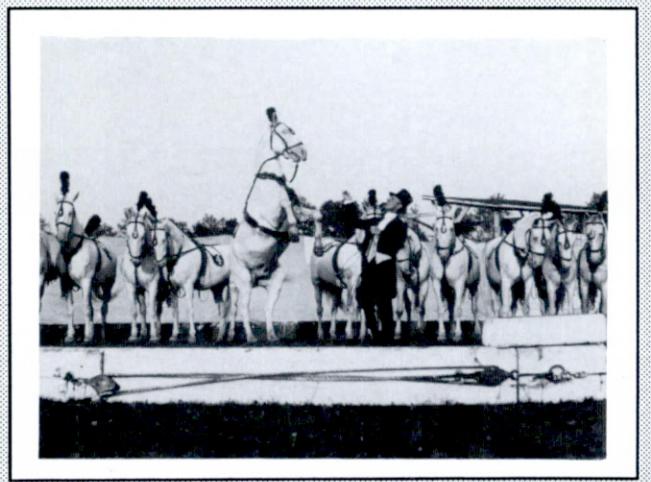


Alfredo Codona and Lillian Lietzel,
Ringling-Barnum 1929.



Paul Jerome & Helen Wallenda, R-B.

Frank Miller, Ringling-Barnum.





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Season's Greetings

PART TWO
SEASONS OF 1951-1952

Biller Bros. Circus

BY FRED D. PFENING, JR.

1951

By early February with the creditors off their backs the Sturmak brothers began preparing for the new summer season. Arthur had returned to the winter quarters in Camden, South Carolina with the trucks and stock following the Providence date. Hy remained in New York to settle with the creditors. On February 1 he left New York to join Arthur in winter quarters.

Following the indoor dates Sturmak gave the show-owned lion act and semi-trailer cage to Prince Ki Gor as compensation for wages due. The show was anxious to cut all expenses and did not wish to feed the lions during the winter.

The February 17 *Billboard* reported further on the Biller financial condition. Alfred S. Julian, attorney for Biller Bros. Circus, had filed a bankruptcy schedule on February 9 in New York Federal Court listing the show's liabilities at \$283,052 and its assets at \$67,400.

The breakdown of liabilities were: \$10,000, wages; \$71,000, federal taxes; \$90,507, secured claims and \$110,668, unsecured claims. The assets were \$8,500, animals, including three elephants, seven horses, eight ponies, three lions, two bears and six monkeys; \$13,705, machinery; and \$44,350, autos, trucks, jeeps and other vehicles.

Ten days later attorney Julian filed an amended bankruptcy schedule with the New York court. This one listed the liabilities at \$274,652 and the assets at \$147,316. The revised assets listed \$17,002, animals; \$26,720, machinery and equipment;

The GMC logo remained on this Biller stock semi-trailer in 1951. Piercy photo.

\$103,148, autos and other vehicles; \$400, stationery and \$44.85, cash on hand.

Hy Sturmak returned to New York on February 16 and reported fresh capital was being sunk in the show to make sure it went out in the spring. The opening stand under canvas was to be in Camden on April 6. He stated that thirty-four men were in quarters and were readying the show for the season. He added that seating capacity was to be increased by 500. It is interesting to note there was no mention of where the "fresh" capital had come from. It can be assumed that the brothers dug down in their own pockets to get the show on the road in 1951.

A winter quarters report appeared in the April 7 *Billboard*. It stated that Win Partello, general superintendent, had arrived in quarters on March 31. A crew of forty had completed rebuilding and painting. All show trucks had been repainted and carried new lettering and pictorial work. New arrivals in quarters were Tommy Bentley, Flo McIntosh and Chester and Sylvia Gregory. Chester was to handle the side show and Sylvia would do her iron jaw act in the big show. The quarters had been open to the public on Sundays with no gate admission. A pony ride inside the front gate had received a heavy weekly play. Arthur Sturmak had accepted delivery on a new house trailer.

The staff remained virtually the same as in 1950: Art and Hy Sturmak, co-owners and managers; Charlie Schuler, press, assisted by his wife and Bernard Sturmak; Win Partello, general superintendent; Chester Gregory, side show manager and Paul Hall, treasurer.

The show opened on April 6 in Camden with a three quarter matinee and a better than half night show. The *Billboard* of April 28 said the bow was in the nature of a come-

back for the Biller organization, which had had a wobbly 1950 season and two ill-fated indoor winter dates.

On opening day it was clear where some of the fresh money had come from. The General Motors logos were replaced by animal paintings on most of the semis. Pepsi-Cola logos were placed on the front of each semi-trailer next to the truck number. Pepsi had been making a concerted effort to edge Cola-Cola out of the outdoor field, which they had previously had locked up. Biller was one of a couple of outdoor organizations that had secured a tie-in with the other soft drink company. Reports said that Pepsi had come up with an unspecified amount of money. In return Biller was to limit bottled beverage sales to the Pepsi product and to advertise on their trucks.

The menagerie, which was side walled at the opening, included three elephants, two black bears and a cub, one polar bear, two lions, a leopard and a cage of monkeys.

Following rehearsals, the performance ran smoothly on opening day, and by the night show the timing was down to a pat one hour and twenty-five minutes. Joe Rossi's band had eleven men. Slayman Ali was equestrian director and Tommy Bentley doubled as announcer. The Cristianis did not return, and were replaced by the Barratte Troupe, who had been delayed upon entering the country and were not on hand for the opening. Prince Ki Gor had also left the show after two seasons.

The opening performance was as follows:

The new Pepsi-Cola logos are shown on the front of the elephant semi no. 80 in 1951. The light plant is at right. Piercy photo.



No. 1 Spec.
No. 2 Flo McIntosh and Marion (Knowlton) Partello, pony drills.
No. 3 Swinging ladders by Maria Elana, Ritta Taliaferro, Jerry Pressley, Sylvia Gregory and Teresa Morales.

No. 4 Clown walk around.

No. 5 Baby elephant presented by William O'Harris.

No. 6 Don Floyd Flying act (5).

No. 7 Rubyette, leaps and tetterboard.

No. 8 Slack wire by Tommy Bentley, Flo McIntosh Trio and Martha Smiga.

No. 9 Sylvia Gregory, iron jaw.

No. 10 Barratte Troupe (3), Juggling.

No. 11 Liberty and high school horses presented by Dewey Scott.

No. 12 Clowns.

No. 13 Marion Partello, dressage horse.

No. 14 Grace Ronna and daughter, rola bola and Rubyette, hand stands and knife leaps.

No. 15 Roberta and Rolon, iron jaw duo.

No. 16 Clown car routine.

No. 17 Web number with Maria Elana, Ritta Taliaferro, Sylvia Gregory, Jerry Pressley, Martha Smiga and Grace Ronna.

No. 18 Navarro Brothers (3), perch act.

No. 19 Elephants presented by Marion Partello and William O'Harris.

No. 20 Clown walk around.

No. 21 Tommy Bentley, slide for life.

Clowns on the show were Horace Laird, Ira Gaskill, Jackie Lynn, Al Jones, Tommy Whiteside, Faye Avalon, Pepo Rolon, Johnny Buffington, Bill Lewis and Jim McCoy.

The staff for the 1951 season as listed in the *Billboard* included the following: Arthur Sturmak, general manager; Win Partello, manager; William Cowan, legal adjuster; Malcolm Fleming, general agent; Pete Marsh, superintendent; Charles Schuler, general press representative; Virginia Schuler, radio and schools; Syd A. Stevenson, press and schools; Bernard Sturmak, press; Steve Kuzmicz, brigade manager; Cleon Emerson, treasurer; Paul Hall, office; Gus

The Jeep stake driver continued to be used during the 1951 season. Pfening Archives.

Taliaferro, front door and auditor; Deacon and Dave McIntosh, mechanical superintendents; Tommy Poplin, chief electrician; Chester Gregory, side show manager; Tex Reppert, inside tickets; Slayman Ali, equestrian director; Tommy Bentley, announcer and George Foster, national advertising representative.

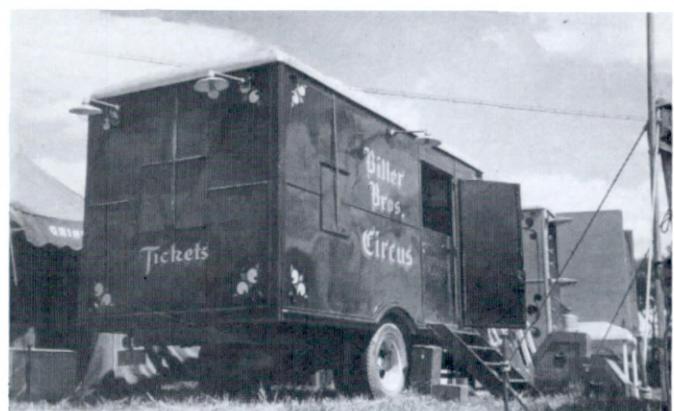
Inside Chester Gregory's side show were Franklin Pierce, knife thrower; Marie Hall, snakes; Rose Marie, sword basket; T. Milligan, magic; R. V. Lewis, minstrel band, with Noah Robinson, Charles Bass, Jazz Lips Richardson, Hooks Tilford, Irene Lewis and Shufflin' Sam; Duke Kamauka, Luana Kali and Mona Kamael, Hawaiian Troupe and annex dancers Phyllis Darian and Pearl Rose.

Phyllis and Pearl provided a strong show in the annex of the side show. Nuts and broads were worked in the side show and there were flat joints on the midway. The income from graft on the circus was important in meeting the daily nut.

By April 12 the show was in Statesville, North Carolina where the matinee was lost due to high winds and a thin one fifth house attended at night. At Lenoir the next day the show drew two full houses. On the 14th in Hickory there were two fair houses.

Biller moved into Virginia for four stands at Martinsville on April 17. The rainy weather killed business in Covington, Virginia on the 26th, with only one third houses. The night show was held up for forty-five minutes due to the weather. The date came at an off time so far as paydays at the major mills were concerned. King Bros. was billed for May 10 at Clifton Forge, Virginia, twelve miles away.

On April 21 the show was in Welch, West Virginia. East Rainelle, West Virginia on the 27th attracted two near capacity houses. The matinee there was delayed thirty minutes for



The Biller ticket truck was not repainted in 1950 or 1951. Van Matre photo.

children to arrive after schools were dismissed early.

Biller was in Connellsville, Pennsylvania on May 3 where the turn out was bad due to rain. The next day in Greensburg business was strong and continued good in Swissvale, McKeesport and Charleroi.

Agent Fleming had lined up strong sponsors for the next few weeks in Pennsylvania and western New York. The show was looking forward to Elwood City, Pennsylvania on May 14 where a number of civic groups had joined as auspices for the benefit of a veteran who had lost both legs in Korea.

Due to problems at the pay window some of the acts that opened in Camden left the show.

New acts were added to the performance. Everett Coriell, head slide; Pringle's and Morey's dog acts and the Drouget Troupe, juggling and iron jaw had joined the show.

The show was in Warren, Pennsylvania on May 23 where the turnouts were mediocre with one third houses. Warren was played without a sponsor but had been heavily billed. The schools had not been dismissed in Warren either. The show was receiving compliments on its appearance and beefs about wild animal billing that did not appear.

The GMC logo on the mechanical truck with boom was replaced by an elephant painting in 1951. Piercy photo.



The show had lost some workingmen and this caused a late arrival in Bradford, Pennsylvania on May 24th.

On May 25 the show entered New York at Jamestown where it had two three quarter houses. Decoration Day, May 30, saw the show in Auburn, New York. Agent Mal Fleming had booked the stand on May 4, less than a month ahead of the show date.

The newspaper ads and press handouts used in Auburn were out of date, referring to attractions no longer with the show. Prince Ki Gor was listed in the ads and the handout listed the Cristianis, Belmonte, the Ivanovs, Ramona and Reynosa, the Hubler Trio and three baby elephants, none of whom were with it.

The handout also noted: "The first circus of the season rolls into Auburn from Cortland early tomorrow morning to provide an added holiday feature. It is the Biller Bros. Circus, which has never before shown in this city. It comes here with an excellent reputation, and the advance men report that spring business has been good.

"Auburn is known as a circus town and with fair weather the Biller Bros. Circus should draw capacity crowds afternoon and night."

On May 31 the Auburn *Citizen-Advertiser* printed an after notice. It read: "Biller Bros. Circus, heading for a long tour of Canada, made its first appearance in Auburn Wednesday and drew a capacity audience in the afternoon but in the evening did not do so well.

"The circus was crowded in tightly on the small lot at Elm and Franklin Streets. The light attendance in the evening was a surprise as Auburn generally goes for these shows. But there were a televised heavyweight prize fight and double-header baseball as counter attractions.

"The circus acts were largely routine and well done, with an occasional number a bit away from the ordinary sawdust melange. The young women performers were artful and graceful in bright costumes during the miscellaneous three ring panoply of convolutions, head balancing, tight wire gyrations, etc. Clowns cavorted in the age-old pattern, horses pranced, elephants rolled, the small band really did itself proud, and when the rain came at night it found many openings in the big top. But the audience dodged the spattering inflow as best it could as the show went on to its soggy finish."

A day or so later an Auburn circus goer wrote a letter to the editor beefing about the Biller show. It read: "DISGRACE. The so called 'circus' which was held at Walt's ground Wednesday is a disgrace to what the word 'circus' means to the average man and woman.

"They banned playing bingo in town for this was 'gambling.' Yet, they allow outside



Tanit Ikao joined the show as a concert feature before the Biller show went into Canada in 1951. Pfening Archives.

ers to come to our town and take advantage of the people.

"We would all be rich if we sold pop at 15 cents a bottle. Fifteen cents for a nickel bottle of pop.

"Biller Bros. Circus advertised much more than it showed. Where were the lions?? Someone said the truck they were on lost its way. Lost its way, indeed! If everyone demanded a refund for misrepresentation, I bet it would have found its way pretty fast.

"With all the money they gyped the people out of, they could surely afford to buy a new tent. We went to see a show, not get a shower!

"This was the worst circus ever to be held in Auburn. In fact it was a disgrace to allow such a circus to come to town.

"Signed: ANOTHER VICTIM, Auburn"

The last stand in New York state was at Ogdensburg on June 2. The show was preparing to enter Canada the next day at Vallfield, Quebec. Biller was looking forward to Canadian stands signed under auspices when the show had been in the Dominion in 1950. There had been some additions to the show prior to going into Canada. Duke Kamakua had added Estelle Hayes and Estelle Massey to his Hawaiian review in the side show. Chuck Taylor had come on as the new chef in the cookhouse. Robert Rolon had fallen during his cloud swing, but was not seriously injured. Tommy Bentley was operating a barber shop in the back yard. Joe Rossi had been off the show for a few days due to doctor's orders.

Tanit Ikao and her female Blackaman act

joined Harry Hart in the concert in June. Ms. Ikao was a Hindu mystic woman whose act consisted of hypnotizing chickens, rabbits, a boa constrictor and an alligator. She also laid on her back in a bed of crushed glass and for a finish walked up a ladder with sharp swords as rungs and then hung in midair with her chin resting on the point of a sword.

The season had not brought solid business to Biller Bros. and Canada had been counted on to lift the show's financial condition. The Canadian tour was to be a long one taking the show through Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario until the end of August.

The June 30 *Billboard* provided the first report on business in Canada. It said that the Biller Quebec trek had been discouraging in its first fifteen days. Middleton, Quebec drew two full houses on July 5, but at Digby on the 6th and Yarmouth on the 7th the attendance at all shows was about fifty per cent of capacity. Biller had played the same towns the prior year.

While the show was in Canada agents of the revenue service followed the show to collect admission taxes daily. The service was after the show for high estimated taxes, but the show's adjuster managed to squelch this effort.

The show was in Riviere Du Loup, Quebec on July 20 where it had a weak matinee and a capacity night house. The light matinee was blamed on a late starting time of 4:15 p.m., and excessive heat. The following day they showed Edmundston, New Brunswick and moved up the Gaspe Peninsula before returning to Quebec. A critical labor shortage plagued the show since entering Canada. The performers did cherry pie to get the big top up and a number of matinees were late in starting.

On Sunday July 22 the show made a three hundred mile jump from Mount Joli to St. George, Quebec. The canvas and seat trucks were ditched as the show was moving to Lac Megantic, Quebec on July 24. The matinee was lost, but they had a straw house at night. A late arrival, due to labor shortages, in St. Agathe Des Monde, Quebec on July 27 caused a cancellation of the afternoon show, but they had a straw house at night. Two capacity houses were registered the day before in St. George De Beause.

Business in Canada was far from what had been expected by the time the show went into Ontario on August 2 at Englehart. A few stands in Ontario were good but attendance was generally weak. At Midland, Ontario on August 17 the show drew one third and one half houses. Maria Eleana Bolanos received shoulder and wrist injuries and an elbow dislocation when she fell from her iron jaw rigging during a performance in Midland. She was taken to a local hospital

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A four page herald was printed in French for the 1951 tour of Canada. Prince Ki Gor was listed inside even though he was no longer with the show. Pfening Archives.

where she was expected to remain for several weeks. The show followed a local fair in Oshawa on August 20, a truck had gone off the road on the way there. Brampton, Ontario on August 21 had a poor matinee and a three quarter night show. The stand was a day prior to the opening of the Canadian National Exposition in Toronto twenty miles away. Cold winds in Brampton ripped the big top. Patching was completed the next day in Guelph in time for a slightly delayed matinee. The total attendance in Guelph was estimated at 1,300 in continuing cold weather.

The show left Canada at St. Thomas, Ontario on August 25 and took Sunday the 26th to clear customs. Imlay, Michigan on the 27th brought the show back to the United States. The show played Howell and Coldwater, Michigan in long jumps to Kendallville, Indiana on August 30. Kendallville provided a quarter and a half house. Biller's move into Indiana placed them in the middle of the Clyde Beatty, Kelly-Miller and Kelly-Morris routes, but it appears serious opposition was not encountered.

Biller played Warsaw and Monticello, Indiana and then entered Illinois at Kanakee on September 3. Joliet and Elgin followed with the show then turning south to DeKalb, La Salle and Kewanee. Route card No. 22 listed the week of September 10 as Galesburg, Macomb, Jacksonville, Taylorsville, Litchfield, Vandalia and Effingham, all in Illinois. Effingham, a Sunday town, was scheduled for a matinee only.

The final route card of the season listed

Mt. Vernon, September 17; West Frankfort, September 18; Murphysboro, September 19; Anna, September 20; and Chester, September 21. All were in Illinois. The final dates listed were DeSota, Missouri, September 22 and Flat River, Missouri September 23. Total mileage Camden, South Carolina to Flat River, Missouri was 10,144.

A newspaper ad in the Ted Bowman collection for Flat River, Missouri listed a matinee only. A story appearing the local paper said the show had been in town since September 17 waiting for the contracted date. This indicates that the show had blown Mt. Vernon, West Frankfort, Murphysboro, Illinois and Fredericktown and Desota, Missouri.

It is believed that the show had no contracted dates after Flat River and wild catted for a few more days. The show moved into a town with no billing and in some cases a newspaper ad only a day ahead. A sound car was the principal method of announcing the arrival of the show in town. These wildcat dates are not all known but the show was contracted for Leachville, Arkansas on September 27. There is a suggestion that this date was not played and that the show had closed after Flat River.

The *Billboard* of October 20 brought belated news of the show's final breath of life. The article read: "Biller gives up, Parks at Memphis, Sturmak show quits in Arkansas after losing trek from Canada.

"Memphis, October 13. Biller Bros. Circus called it a season October 4 and moved from Clarendon, Arkansas to the Mid South Fairgrounds here. While there were reports that the show had folded, it remained in business and apparently was expected to reopen next season.

"Part of the show was working this week as an attraction at the Negro fair at Brownsville, Tennessee and Arthur Sturmak was in charge.

"The closing at Clarendon marked the end of a disastrous trek from the Canadian border. Show had been wildcatting for several days, using no advance.

"Returning to the States late in August, Biller Bros. moved rapidly through Indiana, Illinois and Missouri before reaching Arkansas. Business continued poor and a number of performers and key staffers left during that period. Bob Cowan and crew left the show several days before it reached Clarendon, it was reported.

"Earlier, the show had not done well in the East or in Canada. It opened in April after negotiating a four year delay in making payments on debts incurred from playing indoor winter dates in New York and Providence.

"In Canada the show played territory it and Dailey Bros. had made in 1950, and business generally was weak. The show was somewhat reduced this season from its 1950 size."

The final *Billboard* article on the show appeared on December 8 and was dated Chicago. It read: "Hy and Art Sturmak, owners of Biller Bros. Circus, said this week that they plan to troupe the show again next season. They were at the outdoor conventions here and reportedly were looking for staffers, including a concession manager. They conferred with carnival executives on the possibility of putting the show on a midway, but no deal was reported.

"Art Sturmak stated that plans call for operating an auspices show next season. He said the show's equipment and stock remained at the fairgrounds in Memphis.

"Hy Sturmak said that reorganization of the show is under way and that much work remains to be done.

"The Biller show went into quarters this fall after an unsuccessful tour marked by wildcatting in the final days and by the skipping of several stands."

After the severe financial beating the circus took in New York and Providence coupled with a generally poor business tour it is remarkable that the Sturmaks kept the show going until October.

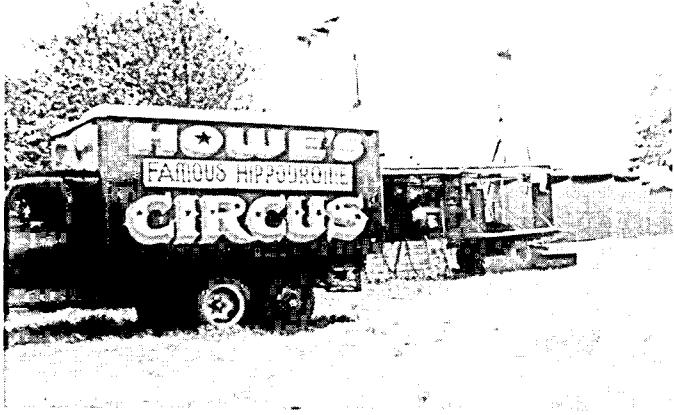
1952

Arthur and Hyman Sturmak were down but not quite out as they faced the season of 1952. Somehow they came up with a bare minimum of cash to try it one more time.

The January 26 *Billboard* brought news of the Sturmaks further activities. It read:

The Howes Famous Hippodrome canvas semi no. 75 with Jeep loaded at rear. Pfening Archives.





The ex-Army shop truck had one of the best paint jobs on the Howe's show in 1952. Pfening Archives.

"Biller re-labeled Howe's Famous Hippodrome. Sturmak tells of new capital; Memphis opening set for April 10.

"Memphis, January 19. Arthur Sturmak announced here Wednesday (16) that he will take Howe's Famous Hippodrome Circus on the road this season with the opening scheduled for April 10. The show, he said, will use Biller Bros. show equipment and stock as a nucleus. The new organization will play all stands under auspices.

"Sturmak stated that financing of the undertaking will be by new principals whom he did not name.

"His statements came as confirmation of reports circulating during the past few weeks that the show would be operated under the Howe's title. Other title possibilities also had been mentioned.

"Sturmak and his brother Hy, of New York, began reorganization efforts last fall. Conferences in New York last week preceded the settlement of 1952 plans.

"It was understood that reorganization of the operating company was completed at the meeting. Biller Bros. filed a petition of bankruptcy some time ago and its business was directed by a trustee, with court approval."

There is speculation that additional funds to take the Howes' show out may have come from grifters, buying the privilege to operate on the show. The "lucky boys" operated openly on the Howe's Famous Hippodrome midway.

A new letterhead was printed for the Howe's title. It looked much like the Biller letterheads and listed the same executive office address at 369 Lexington Avenue in New York. A small line listed the winterquarters at the Memphis fairgrounds, and a post office box number in Memphis.

Syd Stevenson wrote to Bill

Woodcock on a Howe's letterhead on January 23 and reported that people were beginning to arrive and the show had received lots of wires and letters from people who wished to join the show.

Another letter in the Pfening Archives on Biller stationery, dated February 6, 1952, written by Syd Stevenson to Bill Woodcock read: "Well the painter and mechanic are here now and have 14 men in winter quarters and have started getting everything in shape, have 3 men sewing canvas. I understand he is to get new canvas but are going to open with the old big top. We open here April 10, 11, 12, sponsored by Variety Club at the fair grounds.

"C. C. Smith was by here the other day to see about having the wagon over here, also Harry Anderson was here for a couple of days this week. A man named Oglesby is painting the show and Walter Rogers is the mechanic.

"Just started two men out contracting and plan to have the phone crews start here just as soon as the Hamid-Morton show is over. They open here February 15.

"We had one of the big elephants die here a few days ago. Pinto was pretty old and had Gastritis (hope that is spelled right) just keeled over one night and we had a Vet out

The side show bannerline remained the same as in 1952 other than retitling the entrance. Pfening Archives.



The Buck Lucas wild west stock was carried in this semi owned by Lucas. Pfening Archives.

real soon he gave her shots but she died about 3:30 a.m."

By March 15 it was announced that George Marquis was the general agent of the Howe's show. Marquis formerly had been with Kelly-Morris. This was a false report as Marquis was the announcer and not an advance agent on the show. The remaining small elephant was sold to the Kelly-Miller show.

Howe's Famous Hippodrome Circus opened on April 11 in Humboldt, Tennessee not Memphis as announced earlier.

Tom Parkinson, then circus editor of the *Billboard*, visited the show in Gallatin, Tennessee on April 19. His report on the show appeared in the April 22 issue. It read: "New Sturmak show has rough debut. Howe's Famous Hippodrome Circus, opened at Humboldt, Tennessee Friday (11) and played to small crowds in cold and rainy weather for the first five days.

"The new Art Sturmak edition was hit by high winds, which demolished one center piece of the big top at the second stand in Paris, Tennessee. Because of that loss the show was limited at subsequent stands to a three pole top and two ring show. It will be back to full size as soon as new canvas arrives. But, as Sturmak said, the important thing is that the show is open and rolling. After the Biller show closed last fall it was generally believed that there was little chance for its reopening. When it did come out of Memphis winter quarters, the opera was a credible aggregation. And when contemplated new additions, including elephants and chairs, come on, Howe's Circus will be in good form.

"The show has switched to the auspices plan this season and expects to play almost all dates under sponsorship. However, the three contracting



agents started late, and for the first six weeks about half of the towns will be played without auspices so as to give the agents time to get far enough ahead. The show is using a liberal splash of attractive billing and Sturmak said a direct mail herald also would be used.

"The performance includes the Sparton Family, Buck Lucas Wild West, and a number of Mexican acts imported by Slayman Ali. Some of the latter are unusually strong, and the show's wire walking display is a high point. The single elephant [Modoc] was left in Memphis, but it and three new imports are expected to come on later. The new bulls are scheduled for June delivery, Sturmak said.

"Opening the two ring version here was a spec with all performers, ponies and saddle horses taking part. Here as well as later some pleasing wardrobe turns up, and the Buck Lucas troupe's contribution to the spec is good.

"This is probably the only show with a woman equestrian director, Betty Biller (Sturmak) blows the whistle here and George Marquis does well as announcer. Eddie Mason and Buck Lucas work pony drills; Rita Taliaferro's pony drill was omitted. A four girl ladder display comes next and usually it has six people. Mannos does a neat pedestal act while Andrex handles chair balancing.

"Remo is new in the featured juggler's position. He handled the spot okay in cold weather here. Faith King and the Sparton Family's dog acts display pooch routines well. Then more newcomers, the Novarro Brothers, perform on the high perch, and this too, is an attention getter. Clowns then make their first appearance, with Orlo Sparitan as producer.

"Reynoso has the tent to himself for a single trap act and he earns the solo assignment with assorted foot and knee stands on the swinging bar. Rola-bola by the Lucas Brothers and Gene Schneck's pedestal headstands

Famous Hippodrome was omitted from the title on the cookhouse truck in 1952. Pfening Archives.



The Novarro Brothers in the backyard of the Howes show in 1952. Pfening Archives.

follow. Buck Lucas brings seven riders in for the first concert announcement.

"Les Clere (2) clown through an adequate casting act that includes some good double casting and a birdsnest. In a two-act display, the Estrada Sisters (3) offer acrobatics and Los Agilas (2) platform acros, perform a one-arm lift that's good.

"Normally, the big wire display lists Josephine Ivanoff, Olga Sanchez and Martha Smiga. This was changed into two displays here. Josephine Ivanoff's feature was a banner leap and Martha Smiga does a basket walk and a leap over a table. Olga Sanchez works bounding rope and tops it with a good series of bounces to the seat. It's a strong presentation for the show and each performer adds much to its effect.

"Andrex and Roberto work cloud swings and come up with several novelties. Clowns, a ballet number and another clown turn brings the performance to the finale. The Estrada Sisters and the Reynoso Trio work iron jaw novelties and top the turn with one member holding the rigging from which the other two are suspended, all iron jaw.

"The concert shows whip cracking, knife throwing and trick riding in sufficient quantity to please the patrons.

"On the staff are: Arthur Sturmak, manager; Hy Sturmak, counsel; Sam Rappert, assistant manager; William Cowan, legal adjuster; Paul Hall, office manager; Gus

Taliaferro, front door; Phil Strit, promotional director; Betty Biller, equestrian director; Sam Taylor, boss canvas; Blackie Price, props; Blackie O'Malley, side show canvas; Tige Hale, bandmaster; Walter Rogers, boss mechanic; Eddie Gray, tickets; O. Roach, electrician; R. V. Lewis, side show minstrel band; Paul Wenger and Manny Malman, concessions.

"In the advance are James De-Forrest, general agent; James Gebhart and James M. Beach, contracting agents; Tom Gunnells, brigade manager and Syd Stevenson press agent.

"The truck bodies are painted red and new title is done in silver. These and other equipment gave a good appearance despite some wear last year and already this season on the canvas. Cage truck was spotted in the side show, which has a neat banner line in front of a two pole top.

"Sturmak said that the first few auspices dates had turned out satisfactory for the most part. Associated Charities backed the Humboldt opening but cold and rain killed the turnout.

"The Paris date had a fair advance sale by the Chamber of Commerce auspices. Then came the cold, wind and rain, with tornado warnings going up in the town. The center piece gave up the ghost at about 7:30 p.m. This forced cancellation of the night show, and it was 3 p.m. the next day, Sunday, before the circus cleared the Paris lot. Clarksville, Tennessee, preceded the frosty Gallatin stand. Clarksville was sponsored by the National Guard for good results and the best day of the several. An open-date contract for a 1953 date was signed with the auspices there."

The Howe's show was in Morganfield, Kentucky on April 22, followed by Earlington, Springfield, Danville, Frankfort and Shelbyville. Frankfort was played April 26 with both shows drawing nearly a full tent.

Howes Famous Hippodrome Circus horse semi in Logansport, Indiana in 1952. Pfening Archives.





This large Howe's billing daub was posted in Logansport, Indiana for the May 3 date there. Pfening Archives.

Shelbyville the next day the show had half houses in good weather. Due to adverse weather and other delays the show blew its contracted stand in Springfield, Kentucky and went on to Danville the next day's stand.

An equipment list of the Howe's show has not been found, however from photos a number of the trucks with the show have been identified. The numbers of the trucks remained the same as on the Biller show. They included:

Semi-trailers:

- No. 10 Props.
- No. 15 Side show.
- No. 20 Wardrobe.
- No. 25 Stringers and jacks.
- No. 34 Former Ringling cage.
- No. 35 Seats.
- No. 38 Sleeper.
- No. 40 Sleeper.
- No. 50 Concessions.
- No. 55 Planks-seats.
- No. 65 Poles.
- No. 70 Horses and ponies.
- No. 75 Big top canvas also carried jeep with stake driver.
- No. 85 Cookhouse.
- No. 90 Light plant.

Straight trucks:

- No. - Shop truck with boom winch.

- No. - Office truck.
- No. - Water truck.
- No. - Commissary.
- No. - Panel sound truck.
- No. - Jeep stake driver.

Most of the trucks carried the Howe's title, however the lettering was not as well done as on Biller.

Biller trucks not on the Howe's show included no. 24 Ringling-Barnum cage semi, no. 28 sleeper, no. 45 marquee and seats, no. 48 baby elephants, no. 80 large

elephants and one of the former army shop trucks.

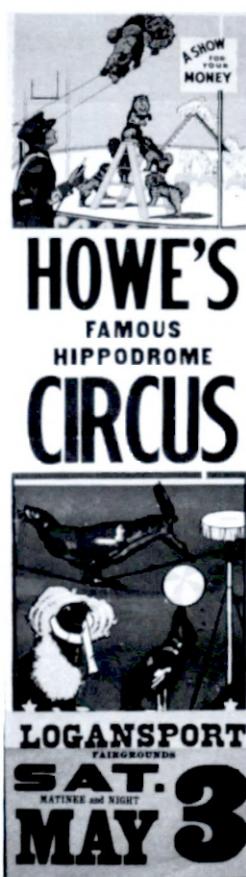
The Howe's show was in Connersville, Indiana on April 29, Logansport, Indiana on May 3 and Elkhart a few days later. The route of the show was not published in the *Billboard* and route cards have not been found so it is not possible to follow the exact route. The show's appearance in Valparaiso, Indiana on May 7 was covered in the *Billboard*. The show did poorly there due to the weather and opposition from Rogers Bros. Circus which had played the town on April 5 under the Elks and had drawn 1,700 people. Valparaiso was so bad the matinee was cancelled and only about three dozen people showed up for the night show.

The show headed north from Illinois and played Delavan, Wisconsin on May 9, Janesville the 10th, Monroe the 11th, Baraboo the 15th, Waupum the 16th, Oshkosh the 17th, Appleton the 18th, Green Bay the 19th, Rhindlander the 22nd, Hurley the 23rd and Ashland the 24th.

Howe's Famous Hippodrome half sheet upright poster used in 1952. Pfening Archives.

Howe's had a labor shortage, perhaps due to late pay days. The show was late in arriving in Woodstock, Illinois after having problems getting off the muddy lot in Valparaiso the day before. The show arrived too late for a matinee.

Indications were that the Howe's Famous Hippodrome had experienced rather poor business since coming out of the Mem-



ONE DAY ONLY	BARABOO FAIRGROUNDS		THUR. MAY 15																					
PERFORMANCES AT 3:00 P.M. 8:00 P.M.																								
 HOWE'S  FAMOUS HIPPODROME  CIRCUS																								
Presents BUCK LUCAS HOLLYWOOD COWBOY STAR AND HIS TROUPE OF COWBOYS, COWGIRLS AND INDIANS																								
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;">RITA BILLER ENDURANCE ALLOFT</td> <td style="width: 25%;">SAUREZ TROUPE</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Famous Riders & Tumblers</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ARABIAN MENAGE HORSES</td> <td>TIGE HALE'S</td> <td>THE GREAT SANCHEZ TROUPE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20 CLOWNS</td> <td>Gold Medal circus band</td> <td>RAMONA PETITE AERIAL SENSATION</td> </tr> <tr> <td>HOWE'S ELEPHANTS</td> <td>PERILIOUSLY ALLOFT RAMONA & REYNOSA</td> <td>BETTY BILLER HAUTE EQUESTRIENNE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ALL-GIRL SYMPHONIC MUSICAL DISPLAYS</td> <td colspan="2">THE ASTOUNDING RENEA SLIDE FOR LIFE</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td colspan="2">RICCI & ENRIQUITA</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td colspan="2">MEXICO'S FOREMOST JUGGLERS</td> </tr> </table>				RITA BILLER ENDURANCE ALLOFT	SAUREZ TROUPE	Famous Riders & Tumblers	ARABIAN MENAGE HORSES	TIGE HALE'S	THE GREAT SANCHEZ TROUPE	20 CLOWNS	Gold Medal circus band	RAMONA PETITE AERIAL SENSATION	HOWE'S ELEPHANTS	PERILIOUSLY ALLOFT RAMONA & REYNOSA	BETTY BILLER HAUTE EQUESTRIENNE	ALL-GIRL SYMPHONIC MUSICAL DISPLAYS	THE ASTOUNDING RENEA SLIDE FOR LIFE			RICCI & ENRIQUITA			MEXICO'S FOREMOST JUGGLERS	
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	RICCI & ENRIQUITA																							
	MEXICO'S FOREMOST JUGGLERS																							
AND—Hundreds of other Stars, Features, and Pageants! SEE—The Herd of Baby Elephants that were Flown by Plane from Bangkok, Siam! SEE—EVERY STAR & FEATURE EXACTLY AS ADVERTISED!																								
NOW ON ITS 69TH ANNUAL TOUR																								
CHILD	TICKETS — Admission and Reserve Chairs on sale CIRCUS DAY at FISHER DRUG STORE		ADULT																					
50¢ PLUS TAX			\$1.00 PLUS TAX																					

Howe's newspaper ad used in Baraboo, Wisconsin. It lists a herd of baby elephants, although there were no elephants with the show. Pfening Archives.

his winter quarters. The early weeks of a circus season require either good business immediately or some money in the office to carry the show through the weak days. If the weather is against the show the problems are exacerbated.

The Sturmak brothers were attempting to operate their circus under the most difficult and near impossible circumstances; it was in bankruptcy, had faced lots of bad weather and had poor turnouts. It was destined to fail. It is thought that the show gave its last performance in Ashland, Wisconsin, although it was contracted for fifteen additional stands in Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota.

The June 7 *Billboard* brought the news of the death of the Howe's Famous Hippodrome Circus. The article said the show had folded in Saginaw, Minnesota the last week of May. The show had been in Saginaw for a week when Arthur Sturmak reported he was making an effort to reorganize and that it would remain in Saginaw while attempting to get the finances straighten out.

It was also reported that an Alabama truck dealer was in Minnesota and was expected to

foreclose on the Howe's vehicles. Sturmak said this was not correct. Sturmak also said that he planned to take the show into Canada after being reorganized. Only a few people had remained on the show after it closed. All of the performers had left.

Joseph Robinson, representing the Robinson Truck and Equipment Co., Mobile, Alabama, arrived in Saginaw and took possession of nearly all of the Howes' trucks. His company had sold the units to the Sturmaks in the spring of 1949 with a minimal down payment and was carrying the paper on the remaining cost of the trucks.

The circus trucks moving in convoy towards Mobile were halted on June 7 in Rochelle, Illinois and remained there for almost a week. The Illinois State Police stopped them at a weigh station south of the city and brought them back to Rochelle and parked them on some city property. The police claimed that all of the trucks lacked safety stickers. Only half of the drivers had licenses and some of the trucks were in bad shape.

Walter H. Hohenadel, editor of *White Tops* and a resident of Rochelle, looked over the trucks while they were stalled in his town and noted that the stock consisted of two bears, some monkeys, two horses and four ponies. It was reported in the Rochelle paper that total fines on drivers and trucks amounted to about \$350.00.

Robinson was quoted as saying that he would have the problems cleared up shortly and planned to move on in two days.

Arthur Sturmak was also in Rochelle. He reported that his part of the equipment was being taken to Kentucky where he hoped to frame a new show. He said the stock and animals were being taken to Peru, Indiana. Both Robinson and Sturmak claimed ownership of the cage trucks. Some of the equipment was said to have belonged to each. Additional circus equipment had been put up as collateral to the Robinson firm by Sturmak during periods of bad business in 1950 and 1951. Sturmak was fined \$33.00 for a trailer that was five feet over-length and without a safety sticker.

There was some suggestion at the time that the King-Cristiani planned to buy two of the trucks from Robinson, and it was understood that a number of Howe working personnel would join the King show.

Robinson, son of the company owner, reportedly paid off the Howe's personnel who had remained with the show in Saginaw. There was suggestion that General Motors, who had a major advertising tie in with the Biller show, brought about the repossession of the trucks. They had no doubt been carried by GMC floor plan finance.

By July 5 Robinson reported that the trucks and show equipment repossessed from Howe's Famous Hippodrome



Only one of the former Ringling-Barnum cages was carried in 1952. It was not retitled with the Howes name. Pfening Archives.

Circus was stored in Mobile and that he hoped to sell them.

An inventory listed office, mechanical, water, utility and panel trucks among the six straight bed models. There were seventeen tractor trucks plus semi-trailers equipped for use in hauling side show, horses, canvas, elephants, stringers, light plant, cook house, props and bible backs. Two sleepers brought the total of semi-trailers to 14.

The Robinson firm also picked up trucks and equipment that had been left in the Memphis quarters when the show left. Robinson also reported that he retained title to the elephant Modoc that had been in the Memphis zoo since April. He said were the city of Memphis had a lien of \$1,500, plus \$2 per day against the elephant. He expected to move the bull to Mobile.

The Robinson firm also had the 110 foot big top and three 40s, a 20 by 40 cookhouse tent, a marquee, the light plant with engines and generators plus seats poles, rigging and other equipment. It is not known if the equipment came back with the trucks or if it was encumbered by the loan on the trucks. Re-

Ritta Biller Taliaferro ready for spec in the backyard of the Howes Famous Hippodrome Circus in 1952. Pfening Archives.



ports at the time indicated that some other equipment and animals had been sold by Mrs. Arthur Sturmak.

Little is known about the disposition of the Biller equipment other than what was purchased by Tony Diano. Sturmak sold Diano eight ponies, menage horses, a polar bear, a black bear and six monkeys. Diano also purchased the two semi-trailer cages that had originally come from the Ringling-Barnum show from Robinson. All of the seating equipment

also went to Diano. The seats went to the Circus World Museum in the late 1960s along with the Cole Bros. ticket wagon and a railroad stock car owned by Diano.

The Howe's Famous Hippodrome Circus was not the only show that closed early in 1952. Tiger Bill Snyder's Wild West and Stevens Bros. Circus also bit the dust in mid-season. In September the following shows were still on the road: Ringling-Barnum, Clyde Beatty, Capell Bros., Cole & Walters, Hunt Bros., Kelly-Miller, King-Cristiani, Mills Bros., Wallace & Clark, Beers-Barnes, Hagen Bros., Rogers Bros., Kelly-Morris and Ben Davenport's Wallace Bros.

Little is known about Arthur Sturmak's activities following the close of the Howe show or if the Internal Revenue Service continued to press him and his brothers for the \$71,000 in taxes due from the New York and Providence indoor dates. As officers of the corporation they were personally liable for these "trust fund" taxes.

Arthur Sturmak was national advertising manager on the Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus in 1958 and 1959. He continued to be active in the concession business and with his brother Hyman operated a very successful concession operation in a number of large arenas and at state fairs throughout the midwest. They also operated concessions at the New York World's Fair in 1964.

Following his retirement from the circus he purchased a home in Louisville, Kentucky, where he resided the remainder of his life. Betty Biller Sturmak and Ritta Biller Taliaferro were natives of Louisville. Arthur Sturmak died of a heart attack on May 15, 1984 at age 79. He was survived by his wife and two sons.

Hyman Sturmak is still alive and continues to practice law in New York City. Brennie is retired and is living in California.

This article is dedicated to the memory of Gus Taliaferro who had long wished for the publication of the Biller Bros. Circus history.

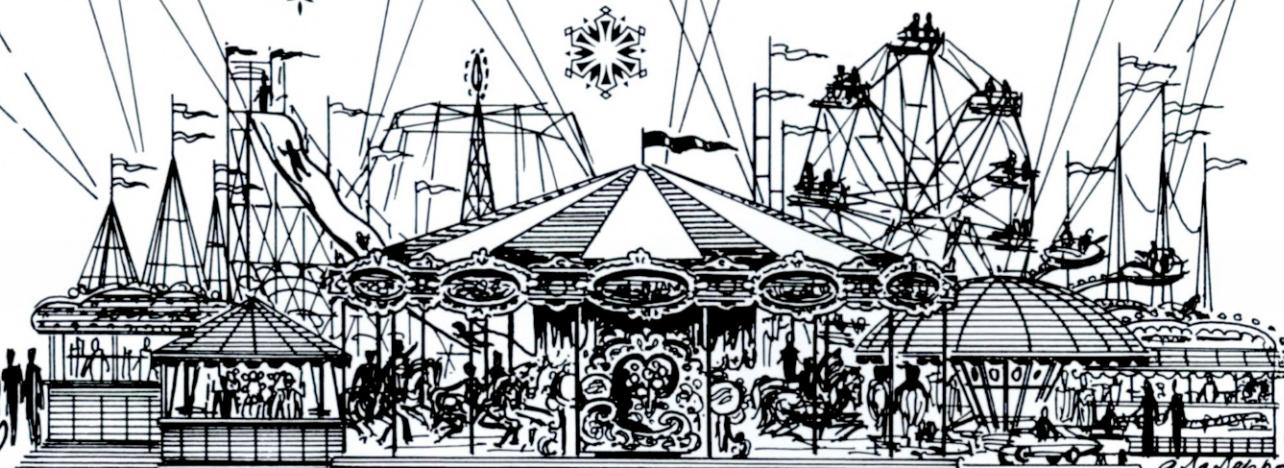
Contributing to the research of this article were the Circus World Museum, Gus Taliaferro, Bill Rhodes, Paul Horsman, Smokey Jones, George Hubler, Ted Bowman, Joe Bradbury and Jack S. Smith.



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YOU AND YOURS

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JIM ELLIOTT
GENERAL MANAGER



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To all our circus friends

John and Mary Ruth Herriott

MORE ABOUT EARLY RIDERS IN AMERICA

THE FIRST TRICK RIDER IN AMERICA

By George Speaight

It is a well-established fact of circus history that the earliest circus in America was presented by John Bill Ricketts in 1793. But who was the first performer of trick horse riding in America? This was the act with which Philip Astley began his performing career, and which was the immediate precursor of the Circus proper. It cannot be separated from the history of the circus.

The credit has hitherto been given to an Englishman, John Sharpe, who appeared in Boston and Salem by November 1771, and to Mr. Faulks, who performed in Philadelphia in September 1771 and in New York from December 1771 to January 1772.¹ They were followed by the famous English equestrian, Jacob Bates, who was in Philadelphia in 1772² and in New York in 1773.

There is, however, a claimant to an even earlier date. In June 1771 Philip Astley let his Riding School in Lambeth, London, to a horseman called Charles Hughes for a week, and for the next few months Hughes remained as a member of Astley's company of equestrians. The next year, 1773, Hughes set up his own Riding School in London, near Blackfriars Bridge, with a display of horse riding very similar to Astley's. There was keen competition between the two men, and they outbid each other in their advertisements.

In *The Gazetteer* for April 28, 1772, Hughes claimed in his advertisement that

eleven years prior to Pool. In the Newport, "he had the honor of performing before their Majesties . . . also in America and Africa." The next year, in *The Gazetteer* for April 10, 1773, he enlarged on this claim.³ In the year 1770 Hughes exhibited before many Indian Nations, in Africa and America, and in 1772 had the honor of performing before their Britannic Majesties in Richmond Gardens, and this present year, before his Majesty and Dauphin of France at Versailles.⁴

Hughes went on to become the equestrian director of the Royal Circus, to visit France, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Portugal, and to virtually found the Circus in Russia. He has been overshadowed by Astley in circus history and, in my opinion, has not been given the credit that is just due by historians. Now, if his claim is accepted, he can be recognized as having exhibited trick horse riding in America earlier than any one else.

Can his claim be accepted? Circus advertisements were full of unverified boasts at that period, but was there any reason for him to invent a visit to a distant seemingly unimportant colony? His reference to "many Indian Nations" is obscure; did he mean Red Indians or Black Africans? But this does not invalidate the basic claim. Hughes must have been riding somewhere in 1770 for him to have been expert enough to rent Astley's in 1771, and there are no records of him in England in that year. The earliest riding exhibitions had been given in 1758, and Jacob Bates had toured Europe as early as

1766,³ so there is no inherent improbability in an English riding master reaching America by 1770. No records of him have been discovered in America so far, but that doesn't prove that none ever existed.

The act that he presented in America would probably not have differed greatly from what he performed two years later in his Riding School by Blackfriars Bridge. This included leaping backwards and forwards over three horses, leaping over a single horse forty times without stopping between springs, leaping the bar while standing on the saddle with his back to the horse's head, riding at full gallop with his head on a pint bottle, riding with one foot on the horse's head, and riding at full speed with his right foot on the saddle and his left toe in his mouth.⁴

If Ricketts was the father of the circus in America, let us hail Charles Hughes as its grandfather in the year 1770.

Footnotes

1. R. W. G. Vail, *Random Notes on the History of the Early American Circus*, 1934.

2. "Jacob Bates," *Encyclopedie dello Spettacolo*.

3. Jacob Bicker Raye, "Notitie van het merkwaardigste meyn bekant," MS in the Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst van Amsterdam.

4. From a bill reproduced, plate 9, no. 10475, in R. Toole-Stott, *Circus and Allied Arts: a World Bibliography*, vol. iv, 1971.

ENTER, MR. GARDNER

By James Cole and Stuart Thayer

Conventional wisdom has long held that the first American performing rider was Thomas Pool, who gave an exhibition in Philadelphia in 1785. In his ads this gentleman announced himself as "the first American that ever exhibited the following equestrian feats," after which he noted the six parts of his program.¹

He has been held to be the first native performer by Greenwood, Odell and Chindahl, an impressive corps of researchers, and no doubt the reason everyone has accepted Pool as such.

Recently, however, James Cole, of Orlando, Florida, has unearthed the fact that there was an American rider who gave exhibitions

Rhode Island *Mercury* of 23 May 1774, appears the advertisement we reproduce here (Fig. 1). In it, Christopher H. Gardner said he would perform on one, two and three horses in Newport on May 24 and again on May 27.

On May 30, the *Mercury* printed a review of Gardner's performance and from it we learn that he was the son of Captain Henry Gardner of Newport, that he excelled the "celebrated Mr. Bates" in several parts of his exhibition and that he was the first American

Fig. 1 Gardner's advertisement in the *Newport, Rhode Island Mercury* May 23, 1774. Author's collection.

HORSEMANSHIP,
By the original American Rider,
CHRISTOPHER H. GARDNER,
Will be performed tomorrow, at the north-east part of
this town,

On one, two, and three horses.
The doors of the manege will be opened at 10 o'clock,
in the forenoon, and he will mount precisely at 11
o'clock.
He will perform again at the same time of day, next
Friday. Tickets, at a quarter of a dollar each, may be
had of Messrs. I. Babad Porter, Robert Lillibridge, jun.
William Davis, Harry Gardner, and of the printer here-
of.

(20)

On Friday last the manly exercise of HORSEMANSHIP was performed, to admiration, before a great number of spectators, in the manege at the north-east part of this town, by Christopher H. Gardner, son of Capt. Henry Gardner of this place. It was allowed by the best judges present, that he excelled the celebrated Mr. Bates, in several parts of the performance. It is surprising that this youth should, in a little time, arise to such perfection in this art, as has come of the best performers in England many years to acquire. As he is the first American that has exhibited in this way, he certainly merits encouragement from his countrymen, who are sons of that ancient stock of Britons, whom they have never yet disgraced by want of genius, learning, courage and many accomplishments.

Mr. GARDNER will perform again next Thursday, the door to be opened at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and he will mount precisely at 4. — He will also ride on Friday the 19th of June, at the same time of day.

Fig. 2 Gardner's ad in the Newport, Rhode Island *Mercury*, May 20, 1774. Author's collection.

to perform "in this way." (Fig. 2)

Jacob Bates, an English rider, had appeared in New York in May, 1773, and in Newport in October and November of that same year.²

It is Cole's contention that Bates returned to England some time that winter (1773-1774), but not before he taught Gardner to ride. Bates might well have sold his horses to the American.

Gardner performed in Newport on May 24 and 27 and June 16, 1774. These are the dates for which Cole found advertisements; there may have been other performances, of course. Then, in July, 1774, he advertised two appearances in Providence; on July 26 and August 2. (Fig. 3)

His ads read "Horsemanship by Christopher H. Gardner, the original American rider, who will perform all the Parts which were exhibited in America by the celebrated Mr. Bates, in several of which Parts it is allowed by good judges he fully equals, or rather exceeds, any thing of the kind ever performed on this Continent."

On Tuesday next, the second of August, he will ride, if the Weather be good (if not, the next fair Day) on Capt. John Maweson's Grounds on the West Side of the Great Bridge.

The Doors will be opened at Five o'Clock in the Afternoon, and he will mount precisely at Six. The Seats are suitable for Ladies and Gentlemen. Tickets, at a Quarter of a Dollar each, will be modest, to be had at Mr. Richard Olney's, and at the Insurance Office. — No Money will be taken at the Door of the Manege, nor any Persons admitted without Tickets. — ~~The harned no Persons will bring any Dogs with them.~~

Mr. Gardner expects to give entire Satisfaction, and will graciously acknowledge all the Favours of those Ladies and Gentlemen who will oblige him with their Company.

Providence, July 16, 1774.

Fig. 3 Christopher H. Gardner placed this ad in the Providence, Rhode Island *Gazette* July 16, 1774. Author's collection.

Footnotes

1. *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 20 August 1785.

2. *New York Gazette*, 31 May 1773.

WANTED

Anything pertaining to the Fred Buchanan Circuses or Granger, Iowa.

YANKEE ROBINSON 1906-1920
WORLD BROS. 1923
ROBBINS BROS. 1924-1931

I will pay \$200 to locate and use photo of circus train parked on siding at the Granger quarters.

All letters answered.

**MERRY
CHRISTMAS
AND
HAPPY NEW YEAR**

Joseph S. Rettinger
P. O. Box 20371
Phoenix, AZ 85036

PEACE ON EARTH GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN

A traditional Christmas refrain that perhaps someday we can live by year round. Wishing all of you Joy, Good Health and Peace in 1990.

Star Rt. 1, Box 962-A
Buckeye, AZ 85326

CLIFFORD E. VARGAS



Cliff Vargas was a classic American entrepreneur. Buying into a small business, within a few years he made it an industry leader through determination, creativity, hard work, and guts. He did the smart things smart businessmen do such as learning every phase of the business, paying attention to details, building a strong management team, taking calculated risks, and reinvesting the profits. His motivation was achieving his vision of what his company could become, not making himself wealthy. And he did it with style that brought glory not only to himself but to his entire industry. To have accomplished what he did in any business would be a remarkable achievement in itself, but to have done it in the circus business is a tribute to his genius. He did what few had done before him and what few will do after him: successfully operate a big tented circus over an extended period.

His early life gave little indication that his destiny was under canvas. He grew up on a farm in Northern California, headed for San Francisco after high school where he worked a series of jobs including selling Fuller brushes, and eventually landed in Chicago where he operated a bar. Reports that his grandfather had been a circus performer in Portugal had more to do with good press copy than reality, and he had no more than a passing interest in the circus before he entered the business.

His first circus work was as a phone solicitor for Ed Peterson, a Shrine circus promoter out of Chicago in the early 1960s. Soon after, he returned to California where he became a hell fire phone promoter and booker for Rudi Jacobi, Sid Kellner and Joe Gatti in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He then hooked up with Charles Germaine who operated the Miller-Johnson Circus mostly as a phone promoted indoor and ball park show. On April 1, 1972, Vargas bought the show from Germaine. He continued with the Miller-Johnson title in 1972 and 1973, making mostly stadium dates. In late 1973 he bought his first tent, selling his home to make the down payment. In 1974 he changed the title to Circus Vargas and began playing the majority of his dates under canvas. It grew in size and reputation through the 1970s and 1980s. Starting in the late 1980s, the show began playing some arena dates.

Vargas was an innovator. While a number of his ideas had been tried before, he refined them to such a degree or was so successful with them that he was recognized as their originator. Examples abound: the free children's ticket, tie-ins with shopping malls, playing numerous locations in large metropolitan areas, gi-

gantic jumps into new territory, making multi-day engagements commonplace, year-round tours. Interestingly, while his first success in the business was as a phone promoter, he used fewer and fewer phones as the years went by.

His circus was noted for spectacular production numbers, first class, fast moving acts, superb wardrobe and excellent production values. He oversaw every detail and was never reluctant to suggest improvements to personnel. He was a perfectionist who constantly drove himself and those who worked for him to do better. Everything he did was for the good of the show. It was his whole life.

He was hyperactive. Besides his extensive management duties, he often took tickets, drove a semi, and helped raise the canvas. He even personally tended to a two-headed calf the show carried for a time. He prided himself on knowing virtually every job on the show which made it impossible for employees to con him about problems in their work.

He had a complex and contradictory personality, being capable of both great compassion and volcanic anger. He once fired a performer for going to her son's high school graduation only to take her back upon her return. He was known to savagely reprimanded employees in front of their co-workers then apologize later. A former staffer recalled that Vargas' outbursts tended to come when the show was doing well; when times were tough, his temper was usually in check.

The years and the grind took the toll on his health. He had open heart surgery in 1978, and was later diagnosed as having terminal cancer. Mercifully, his heart gave out on September 5, a day before he was to start a round of chemotherapy treatment. He was sixty-four. He often said he would never retire from the circus, and he didn't.

When asked to name his contribution to the circus business, his associates, to a person, said it was his showmanship, his commitment to giving the public a great circus, and his love of the game. One went so far to say that he sparked the revival the circus has enjoyed in recent years. His circus and his name will continue under the capable direction of Joe Muscarello and Jack Bailey to whom it was willed. Chances are it will prosper for years to come. They may, in fact, take it to new heights.

But it won't be the same for we won't see Cliff Vargas' likes again. He was a great, great showman who loved the circus like few others. Fred Pfening III

Part Seven

HERBERT'S HORSES

By Dorothy Herbert

CHAPTER 76 COCKATOOS

At one time there was a bird trainer by the name of Proskie who, like many other circus people, used to spend his winters at George Christy's winter quarters in Houston, Texas. As a boy, A. W. had spent many hours watching him train his birds.

Mr. Proskie had three daughters, and he broke a cockatoo act for each of them just before he retired. This was, of course, in the days before there was a ban against the importation of parrot-like birds. Since there were eight birds in each act, plus a few spares, it must have been quite a sight to watch him at work. He made all of his own props for the acts. He also taught his girls how to train the birds, so that they might break replacements from time to time. Each of the girls traveled around the country for many years with their acts and then, one by one, quit the business.

We had a phone call one day while we were still at the bird farm in Reseda from one of his daughters. She was retiring and leaving the road, and asked if we might be interested in buying her act. We went to see it and liked it, so we bought it. I then worked it a number of times on television.

Shortly after completing the motion picture *The Bird Man of Alcatraz*, I worked the bird act on a television show, one that had national coverage. The next day we received a call from August Busch, the owner of the Budweiser brewery. He invited us to come to St. Louis for an interview. He requested that we bring the birds and props with us; he would pay all expenses.

We were met on our arrival in St. Louis with a car for us and an enclosed van to transport the birds. We drove directly to Mr. Busch's zoo and, after the birds were situated, drove to the hotel where reservations had been made for us.

The next day we worked the act and Mr. Busch at once made a deal for it. He then asked if he might engage us to break another just like it for the new zoo which he was building in Van Nuys, California. The one he had just bought from us was to go to Florida and be shown at the Busch Gardens there.

The restrictions on the importation of birds from Australia does not include zoos, which may buy them for display purposes, but are not allowed to sell them.

Mr. Busch told us that he would have the birds flown in directly to us--eight white greater sulphur crested cockatoos.

We had their quarters and training area all ready for them when they arrived and, after a few days rest, proceeded to start their training. Now, since they were perfectly matched, telling them apart was a problem. I solved this by placing a few drops of vegetable dye on each of their tails, then making out a chart to keep track of what each one was being trained to do. I also put some of the same color dye on each perch where they were to sit, making it easy to know where they were to go.

A. W. had the props for the act built and helped me with the training for a while, then it was time for him to get back into the business of buying and selling birds. Certainly, we had lost a number of our contacts during all of the months we had been working on the *Bird Man* picture. People from whom we had been buying birds had found other outlets for them. There was no use trying to hold out any longer. A. W. received and accepted an offer to go to work for the San Francisco Zoo so, once more, I was left alone, only this time with a flock of birds.

Since I did not have much of anything else to do, I devoted more time to them than a person normally would do on a job of this

Dorothy and her cockatoos at Busch Gardens in Tampa, Florida. Author's collection.



sort. I made a game out of it. I would have my breakfast then go out to the barn where the cockatoos were housed, two to a cage. There was a large aviary in conjunction with the room in which they were kept. I would take each one out of its cage and place the bird on the floor of what I now called the playroom, and go on to the next cage and do the same. After they were all in the playroom, I would clean their cages. Each cage had a wire grate in it, which I would remove. On the tray below I had placed white sand and, with a scoop, I would quickly gather up this sand and place it in a sifter, leaving the now-clean sand on the bottom.

After the cages were all cleaned and serviced with fresh feed and water, the training session would begin. At first I would get each one on a training stick (a piece of dowling) and then I would place it on its respective perch. Later on after each one knew his own place I got the idea of having them climb up a ladder from the floor and go on to its perch. This served two purposes: it eliminated having to get them on a stick and then place them on their perch and, also, in the event one should for some reason fall off of the table during the act, I would not have to chase after it; it would run to the table and climb back up.

I gave them the following names, which I thought would be easy for the handler to remember: August, Nora, Homer, Edward, Eu-nice, Sam, Edna and Robin. The act went as follows: Two cockatoos dance the round

waltz. One cockatoo pushes a wheelbarrow to the end of the table, turns it around and brings it back. One cockatoo counts by ringing a bell. One cockatoo pushes a cart upon which another rides to the end of the table, turns it around, and brings it back to the perch. Four cockatoos ride a merry-go-round while another cockatoo pushes. On the top of the merry-go-round is a toy airplane, another cockatoo perches on it. One cockatoo works on the horizontal bars.

Three bars complete this act. The first bird goes across, turns around



Kathy and Louis Goebel, owners of the World Jungle Compound, in 1967. Author's collection.

and comes back, not missing a bar, going over the top of the bars. Then, another bird runs underneath the bars. One cockatoo starts from a perch position, spins around, then jumps to bar two and spins around, then jumps to bar 3 and spins around--like a forward somersault.

As the second part of this act, another bird grabs the bar with his mandible (lower jaw) then puts his feet on the bar and releases his mandible to turn upside down and backwards, then releases his feet to end up on the floor. He repeats this on bar two and three, then returns the same way.

The castle act runs as follows: A bird is placed inside the castle through a downstairs door; the bird automatically climbs a ladder inside the castle to a door on the second floor, and waits there for the door to be opened. A toy cannon is used to simulate an attack on the castle. Upon firing of the cannon, the castle starts to burn. A cockatoo climbs an outside portable ladder to release the cockatoo waiting inside. The cockatoo inside comes out and returns to his perch, as does the one who has opened the door. Then a cockatoo climbs the ladder to extinguish the fire. To complete the act, a cockatoo raises the American flag in victory.

It took a little over a year to break the act and teach someone to work it. After the act had been delivered to Busch Gardens in Van Nuys, I went to San Francisco to visit A. W.

CHAPTER 77 ALASKA

Prior to A. W.'s retirement from the San Fran-

Now we had to figure out what we were going to do next. The decision was made for us.

A gentleman rode into Jungle Land one day, shortly after our return from San Francisco. He was driving the most flamboyant car I had ever seen. Wild animals were painted all over it, and signs on the doors proclaimed "Hollywood Movie Land Animals." He looked like a movie star himself, so handsome was he--Gene Holter.

After making his identity known, he asked if he might look around, then he asked if we would work our dogs and ponies for him. He had little or nothing to say. After the acts were over, he said, "How would you like to go to Alaska?"

Well, we had never been there, so, why not? We went to a nearby restaurant for lunch and during the meal made a deal. He told us that any animals we would not be using could stay at his place.

We still had a few of our motion picture cockatoos, macaws, and parrots, along with Wango, our gibbon ape. These we left at Holter's ranch, where he had a small zoo.

We gave the pigeons from the show in

Entrance to Louis Goebel's World Jungle Compound in Thousand Oaks, California. Pfening Archives.



cisco Zoo, and having no special objective in mind, but knowing that some sort of transportation was going to be necessary for all of the animals we had accumulated, he shopped around and located a Dodge truck, in which he installed cages for the dogs and stalls for the horse and ponies.

Upon arriving back in Thousand Oaks, we took all of the animals to Jungle Land, which belonged to our good friends, the Goebels, and where we knew we would be welcome.

San Francisco to a little boy we knew. We no longer had a house trailer, nor would we have attempted to take one down the Alcan Highway if we had. It was the roughest road anyone could imagine. The freezing over and thawing out causes the land to sink, making big chuck holes. Road gangs worked constantly, weather permitting, but never got caught up. The melting snow turned to water, which rushed down the mountains, flooded the roads, and washed out the attempts they made to repair the latest damage.

I find that I have made no mention of how we cared for our animals while traveling. When on a circus or fairgrounds, we would put up two picket lines, one for the ponies and one for the dogs. The dogs were allowed to remain out as long as feasible, then, each had a separate cage. The exceptions were the Chihuahuas of which I usually carried two or three; they seemed to like to bunk together.

When traveling overland, the dogs were taken out early in the morning for a run, and again at noon. We tried to coordinate this with our lunch break. After picking up our lunch at a restaurant, we would find a nice spot, tie out the dogs, and eat in the truck, thus saving traveling time. After each of the dogs had been watered we would drive on. In the evening, after they had been watered and fed, they were allowed to remain out during the time we were attending the other animal's needs.

Having been told that eating establishments were few and far between on the Alcan Highway, I bought an ice chest and, just before that long journey down that never to be forgotten trail, filled it to overflowing.

Since the ponies, dog cages, and props took up all of the room in the truck, the only thing left to do was pack one trunk with wardrobe and load it with the props. Our personal suitcases had to ride in the cab of the truck with us.

We stacked them all up on the floor on the side where I was to ride, placed the ice chest on the seat between us, locked the door on my side, and filled up every available space with canned goods, crackers, and an assortment of other things. I took along an electric hot plate, coffee pot, and plenty of instant coffee and Coffee Mate. This stood us in good stead later on.

On top of all this conglomeration, I also threw in a couple of pillows and blankets, but it still did not look too comfortable to me. This, then, was how we made the trip to Alaska and back. I got used to the strange half-bed, with my feet

on the dashboard and, later on, even managed to get some sleep while curled up into a ball.

Despite this inconvenience, and many others, the moment I was again on the road I had a feeling of exhilaration, like a bird set free, or a prisoner who had been handed a reprieve. I think I had been born to travel, and for so many years I had missed it so.

Always before I had accepted all of the journeys as a matter of course; now, heeding the words of a song, "You may never pass this way again," I was determined to enjoy every moment of it. Every new and pleasant sight along the way I tried to index in my mind so that I would have them to remember in the years to come. I felt young again, and happy, happy, happy.

My rejuvenation must have been obvious, because A. W. remarked, "You know, with a face lift and a manicure you would look like the girl I married," which, for him, was pretty close to a compliment.

After hitting the snow country, the first afternoon that we unloaded the dogs for their run, I was in for a surprise. When I was a child in Michigan, I had a dog which had run and played in the snow with me, and seemed to enjoy it as much as I. Then, when Mother and I were living in Scottsburg, my German shepherd dog, Pat, loved to follow me through the snow when I went horseback riding.

We had pulled over to the side of the road, and for miles all you could see was a blanket of snow. Where we were at the time, it was only about two or three inches deep. The antics of my California canines was delightful to watch. Several of them let out a yelp, as though they had been set down on a hot stove lid; others shook one leg and then another, like a cat that had stepped on flypaper. After a few minutes, the more aggressive ones started to romp and play, and several delighted in rolling in the snow. Ere long, all were having great fun, with the exception of the Chihuahuas, who sat huddled in their little wool sweaters which I had knitted for them. Down the road I noticed a tree with a brown space around the trunk where no snow had fallen. I gathered up my three little pooches and carried them to that area and let them answer the call of nature there.

Mr. Holter had two drivers for each of his semis, with a sleeping compartment in the cabs. They, of course, could make far better time than we could. Since they were going to have to take some of their stock back to the nearest zoo to board until his return to the states, he suggested that we go on ahead.

The drive through Canada took several days and, as a whole, was uneventful, except for one very unpleasant experience. We had

a replacement in the dog act, a pretty fox terrier. He was very smart and A. W. had taught him a number of tricks, including a high diver climbing up a ladder. At our first night's stop, after arranging to stable our ponies at a fairground and all animals had been fed and watered and put up for the night, we drove to a motel and checked in. Said dog began to bark, and he would not stop. A. W. got up a couple of times to see if he could get the dog to shut up, to no avail. Then the mo-

over, and then said, "But, I have one that does a number of tricks that I will give you. Frankly, though, he barks all of the time." The old man was delighted, and we unloaded the high diving ladder and gave him that, also.

Many weeks later, on our way back to the United States, we happened to pass by a fair where that same carnival was working. We stopped, on the chance that the old man might still be with it. He was, and could not thank us enough for the dog, which he said was now the feature of his dog act.

A. W. asked him how he had stopped the dog from barking. The old man laughed and said, "Oh, that was easy." He opened the door to his trailer and there, fast asleep on the old man's bed, was Skipper.

But, to get on with our journey. We were winding slowly up a steep mountain when, suddenly, Gene Holter's big semis overtook us and, with much friendly honking and hand waving, continued on their way. Gene, who was close behind them in his beautiful car, flagged us down at the next rest area and asked if there was anything we might need. After we had assured him that everything was fine, he said, "We will be seeing you in Fairbanks."

As long as the rest of Gene's outfit had been behind us, we had a feeling of security; but now they were gone, and we had all those many miles ahead of us. You seldom saw another car, and could go for miles without any signs of civilization.

The road signs told us we were coming into White Horse, quite a large town for that part of the world. At least we could find nice lodgings and a good meal for a change. To say we were surprised would be putting it mildly, for what did we see but Gene Holter's trucks parked by the side of the road. We knew that they always traveled together and, if one stopped they all stopped. Something must be wrong. Something was. One of the trucks had broken down and it had been necessary to send back to the United States for the necessary parts. We drove to where they had unloaded all of their stock and left our ponies there. After caring for all of our charges, we went to a motel. Gene met us for breakfast next morning and told us to go on ahead. Sort of like the tortoise and the hare.

The scenery was awesome, the roads horrible. Maintenance crews worked on them constantly. The roads froze over solid during the winter and, then, when the "Big Thaw" comes and the ice starts to melt, great sections caved in. The roads were often flooded, and we would be towed through the water by trucks stationed there for that purpose.



Gene Holter, and one of his racing ostriches, in the late 1960s. Bill Biggerstaff collection.

tel manager came and requested that we leave. We were tired and had to have some rest. We drove around until we found a vacant lot with nothing nearby, parked the truck there, and walked several blocks to another motel. It was obvious we could not go on in this manner for the entire trip.

The next night, when we arrived at a fairground, they said that they could accommodate us, but we would have to use some stalls far in the rear, as a carnival was in progress in the front of the grounds. After feeding and watering the animals, we put the dogs back into the truck and, since there was no one around that the barker might disturb, we left the truck and walked to the front of the fairgrounds and called a taxi to take us to a motel.

Next morning, while we were feeding the animals, an elderly man came by. He told us that he had a small sideshow with the carnival and that he put on a little, trained animal circus. He asked if we might know someone in the states who would sell him some trained dogs. A. W. explained to him all of the red tape connected with bringing them

It was getting late. We were tired, hungry, and irritable when we arrived at Watson Lake, an inspection station. A. W. went into the office and, before long, got into quite an argument with an inspector. It seemed that no one had bothered to inform him in advance of our pending arrival. All of the necessary papers pertaining to our expedition were far behind, with Gene Holter.

I was huddled in the cab of the truck with a blanket over me. The inspector, after looking things over to see what was in the back of the truck, came to where I was seated and demanded that the door be opened on my side. At that time, A. W. used a shaving cream called *Hot Lather* which really made a lot of suds. Being too tired to put up an argument, I unlocked the door, which had not been opened since leaving California. The inspector opened the door and, just as he did, I removed the blankets preparatory to getting out, and soap bubbles started coming from everywhere. The cap had come off of the container, and the bumpy road had caused it to foam up. To add to the confusion, canned goods from behind the seat started falling out and rolling everywhere. The inspector had to laugh.

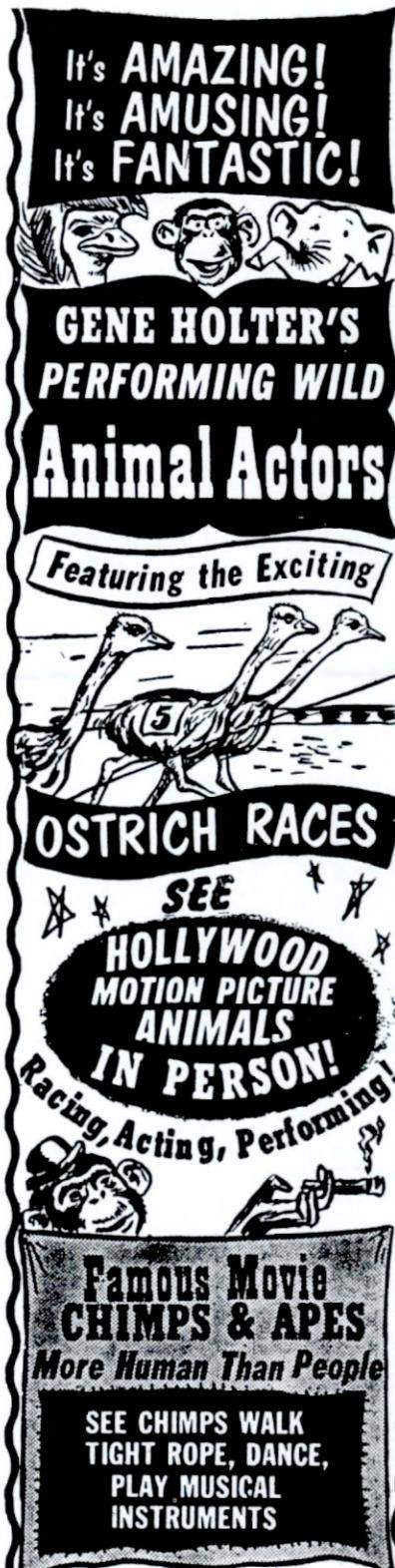
He invited me to come inside. His wife was in another room waiting to drive home with him. She took me into the restroom and we tried to wash the soap off. A bubble bath like that you have never seen. The more water we used, the soapier I got, and I had it all over me. The washroom itself became a mess. We both got to laughing so hard, her husband came to see what was the matter.

Mr. Brown, the inspector, asked us where we had intended to unload and spend the night. When we told him that we hadn't the least idea, he insisted that we stay at his place, and his wife joined in. The next man on duty arrived shortly thereafter, and we told him that if the rest of our outfit came through, to please let them know where we were.

We followed the Browns to their home, a lovely place made completely of logs. When we arrived, their son helped A. W. to unload and feed and water the stock while I changed clothes and got cleaned up. We had a great dinner--venison, made up into a stew--which I had never tasted before. There was homemade bread, and a pie concocted from dried fruit. Fresh vegetables and fruit were hard to come by, and very expensive. Canned foods were also very high priced. Before we left the next morning, I gave our hostess some that I had brought along.

After dinner, Mr. Brown and his son took A. W. for a walk in the moonlight down to the nearby lake. There they could watch all of the wild animals come out of the woods for water.

Later on, when they returned, A. W. located a bottle of spirits he had stashed away... in case of snake bite... and we all had a couple of drinks, seated in front of



Newspaper ad used by Gene Holter and his Movieland Animals. Pfening Archives.

a huge, wood-burning fireplace. Our bed was an old fashioned feather bed, and we slept like logs. Gene stopped by in the morning to

let us know that they had caught up with us, and stayed for a breakfast of fresh caught fish and homemade biscuits. We loaded up and promised to stop by on our way back to the states.

So once more we were behind and on our own, but not for long. Later in the day we again sighted the Holter trucks lined up by the side of the road. We stopped to see what the matter might be. They were parked across from a very picturesque lake. It had seemed an ideal spot to stop and water the animals. The elephant and the hippo had enjoyed their swim immensely, so much so that the hippo had refused to leave. Now, you do not buy a hippopotamus with small change, so there was nothing they could do but wait until he finished his prolonged swim.

We made the rest of the trip without mishap, and shortly before arriving at our destination, the Holter gang again overtook us and crossed the finish line in the lead.

Since we did not have a groom, we had been wondering if we might encounter some difficulty in hiring someone to help out. This proved to be no problem whatsoever; there was never any shortage of help. Everywhere we went, the kids all wanted to help feed and groom the ponies. There were horses in Alaska, but the ponies were something new to them.

I shall long remember and ne'er forget, the opening day of the Gene Holter Trained Wild Animal Show. Of course I had heard of Gene's show, everyone in our profession had, but to witness it was something else.

Gene made out a program as to the running order of the show but, other than that, no two shows were ever alike. Anything could happen, and usually did.

His own employees saw to it that the animals were available, but, from that point on, the audience itself put on most of the show. Before each event, people were invited to come and participate; not only did they respond, but had a whale of a time to boot.

There were camel races; sulky races with ostriches taking the place of horses, a sight to behold; zebra races; elephant races; an unrideable donkey which pitched everyone off; and a wrestling tiger, with a prize to anyone from the audience who might be able to throw it. Sandwiched in between, were acts such as ours, for a change of pace. For a climax, a real show stopper: all of the animals, with the exception of the ostriches and the tiger, were brought out, and a free-for-all race was held. To be sure, many of them bit the dust, but nobody seemed to mind.

We played all of the towns in Alaska that were big enough to accommodate us, and some that looked as though they weren't, but we had crowds wherever we went. When the Alaskan tour was over, we returned to the United States; stopping on the way back to have a nice visit with our friends the Browns in Watson Lake.

The first show, stateside, was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There we were joined in July of 1971 by another of Gene's units, consisting of several more large semis, and many more animals.

Each year the Circus World Museum, located in Baraboo, Wisconsin, in conjunction with the Schlitz Brewery, put on a parade which is rivaled only by the renowned Rose Parade in Pasadena, California. Circus wagons of bygone years, from all of the various circuses, are drawn by teams of horses from all over the country who come there with their proud owners to participate. All sorts of animals are needed to ride in the circus cage wagons, and Gene furnished these, along with his herd of elephants, which were ridden by pretty local girls. Two other herds were also in the parade.

For ten days preceding the parade, a big celebration was held, which included a circus program that Gene produced. We presented our pony drill as part of the Holter program. A complete change of pace. No races, just circus acts this time.

Then it was on to the fair dates, and back to the animal wild west show.

Working with the Holter show was to us great fun. We no longer had the responsibility connected with a large unit, such as we had had when playing fairs on our own. True, we were not making the big money, but we were not having the worries either. With just two acts to put on twice a day, there was time left to enjoy one's self.

Basically, it was a family show. Gene's son, daughters, and son-in-law were the backbone of the show; the rest of the crew felt as though they were family, too, and were treated as such.

Shortly after returning to the states, we bought a house trailer. After that, traveling was much easier for us.

The season ended, as all seasons do, and we went home to Thousand Oaks for the winter. We played a few television shows and some spot dates during the Christmas holidays but, other than that, there was not too much in the offing. Then, one day the phone rang. It was Gene. He asked if we were going back to Alaska with him, and we said, "Sure." Forgotten were the bad roads, flat tires, bad accommodations on the Alcan Highway, and the sometimes bitter cold. Like a couple of old fire engine horses, we were off and running when we heard the bell.

This time, we were to play a couple of dates in New Mexico before the Alaska tour, and we would cross over at a different port of entry: Sweetwater, Montana.

Also, rather than his Hollywood Trained Animal Show, he was taking a circus. In order to maintain the proper atmosphere, he was taking a complete tent, seats, and the works. All of this equipment would meet us at the border after we finished playing the New Mexico dates.

CHAPTER 78 THE BAERS

I have avoided, as much as possible, the use of names, lest someone take offense. However, I feel at liberty to include the following.

We were assembled at our first New Mexico date, preparatory to going to Alaska.



Parley and Ernestine Clarke Baer at the Rose Bowl, Pasadena, California in 1988. Author's collection.

From the looks of all the paraphernalia, it was going to be quite a show.

I had retired and was going along, more or less, for the trip. Before the first show a meeting for all of the personnel was called. A. W. was busy and told me to go and see what it was all about. I found assembled a most imposing array of talent. Besides Gene's elephants and other animal acts, he had hired the popular Gentle Ben, the bear, and his trainer; and a well-known magician who, at the climax of his act, would turn his lovely assistant into Gene's wrestling tiger.

But the big surprise was his selection of aerial talent. He had hired Bob Yerkes, who produces all of the aerial numbers for the well-known television show "The Circus of the Stars." Bob was presenting, along with several other numbers, a flying return act in which he was featuring Ernestine Clarke. We had been told that some other acts would join us at the border. It looked like an awful lot of equipment to take over the Alcan Highway.

I walked over to where the meeting was about to take place. A formidable-looking man proceeded to lay down the law in no uncertain terms. I knew that he was a motion picture actor by profession, and could only assume that he was playing the part of Zack Terrell at his worst . . . minus the cane.

While he was busy scaring the wits out of everyone, I noticed two very lovely young ladies who were continuing to talk to each other, and paying no attention to him whatsoever. I felt sorry for them, knowing that sooner or later he would let them have it. He called for everyone to be quiet. Then, when his back was turned, one of the young ladies stuck out her tongue. His daughters. They knew he was all bark and no bite, but he played his part to perfection that day--Parley Baer.

Ernestine Clarke, born to be the star she was, descended from two of the most famous families in circus history. On one side, the world renowned Hanneford bareback riders who have never had an equal and, on the other, the great Clarke flyers.

Circus acts are rather like a tradition. They are handed down from generation to generation. Having the best of two worlds at her disposal, there was no way that she could miss.

She had the same regal walk that was characteristic of the females in the clan. I could not help but wonder if perhaps she might be a snob; however, this was not so, and from the very moment I first met her, I adored her.

Parley and Ernie have helped me through several crises these last few years, and I am grateful. This last one, the editing of my book, took all of the grit and determination that Parley could muster, and I hope he was able to endure it.

CHAPTER 79 THE FINAL JOURNEY

The second trip up the Alcan Highway was not to be without incident either. This time, we were crossing over into Canada via Sweetwater, Montana. The tent, pole wagon, seats, side show, and concession wagons were all there, awaiting our arrival. They had passed inspection and were all set to continue on, pending Gene's posting of the necessary bonds. This matter taken care of, they went on ahead. Some of the trucks seemed to be very heavily loaded, and I wondered how

they would make out on the rough road ahead.

There were plenty of corrals available and all of the stock was unloaded. We had a long wait, as the inspector was busy elsewhere. It was beastly hot, but this was not too bad as we still had our house trailers with us; we would store them later. Arrangements had been made to leave them at a trailer camp just before starting up the Alcan Highway.

In retrospect, many things that happened seem hard to believe . . . this was one of them. When the inspector arrived, at long last, he passed all of the animals and they started on their way--with the exception of ours. Our papers were in order but there was no way of telling the ponies apart because they were so perfectly matched. After you were around them for a while, of course, you could tell, but the inspector would not take our word for which was which. Since he had agreed that all were in perfect health, we could not see why it would matter, but he was adamant. A. W. offered to set up the ring curb and work the act for him (the harnesses had numbers on them) but he declined.

He said that he would have to talk long distance to our veterinarian in Thousand Oaks, California, to make sure that these were the same ponies for which he had made out the papers. Since this was on a Friday, and he was now ready to leave and would not be back again until Monday, we would just have to wait.

Monday morning, while we were eating at a local restaurant, A. W. struck up a conversation with some men who were taking a load of horses to a horse show in Canada. He told them about the delay and one of the men asked, "Have you shaken hands with the inspector?"

A. W. answered, "H____, why should I, all he is doing is causing me a lot of trouble." The man then explained what he meant by "shaking hands."

The inspector was at the border station when we arrived. A. W. put in a call to our veterinarian in Thousand Oaks. I waited until the inspector was through talking to our vet and, before he had a chance to say anything, I breezed in and held out my hand (which contained a fifty dollar bill) and said, "Good morning to you."

The inspector turned to A. W., who was standing at the counter, and said, "You had

This photo of some of the Gene Holter animals and semi-trailers appeared in an advertising courier Holter used in the late 1960s. Pfening Archives

best get loaded up and on your way, you are getting a late start."

I gave A. W. a poke as I passed him, before he could say anything. We loaded up in a hurry and went on.

By now we were three days behind the others. We came to a campsite where it had been arranged for us to leave our house trailers while making that long trip up the Alcan Highway. All of the others, of course, were already there. We unloaded the trailer and put the things that we would be needing in the truck, and I was, once more, in my cramped position in the cab of the truck, with all of the baggage under my feet.

At the next checkpoint in Canada, A. W. was inside having our papers inspected and making the necessary arrangements. I was walking a couple of dogs.

Gene had hired the trainer with his motion picture bear Gentle Ben to go with us to Alaska. The presentation had gone over nicely at the two shows we had just played, however, I overheard this conversation while walking the dogs.

"Why in the world would anyone want to take ponies and dogs to Alaska?"

"If you think that's flakey, you ought to have been here two days ago. A guy came through here with a bear, said he was going to work with a show. Who in Alaska would pay to see a bear, with them running loose all over the place?"

Someone must have told the bear trainer the same thing because, when we arrived at our destination, we found that he had not shown up for the date.

When we reached the inspection point at Watson Lake, our friend, Mr. Brown, was waiting for us and, having been informed of our delay by Gene Holter, rushed us right through.

By the time that we, at last, drove into An-

chorage, the tent was in the air and all of the riggings were up. They had encountered a problem, though. They discovered that the tent which Gene had leased was not high enough to accommodate the flying act, so they had set it up outside. It showed up to great advantage, but it was pretty rough on the performers, as some of the evenings were very cold. But trouper that they were, they worked just the same.

Pulling into the back of the lot, where a tent had been erected to house the livestock, we were delighted to find the same bunch of kids who had helped us before waiting for us. The ponies and dogs had never before been greeted with such enthusiasm.

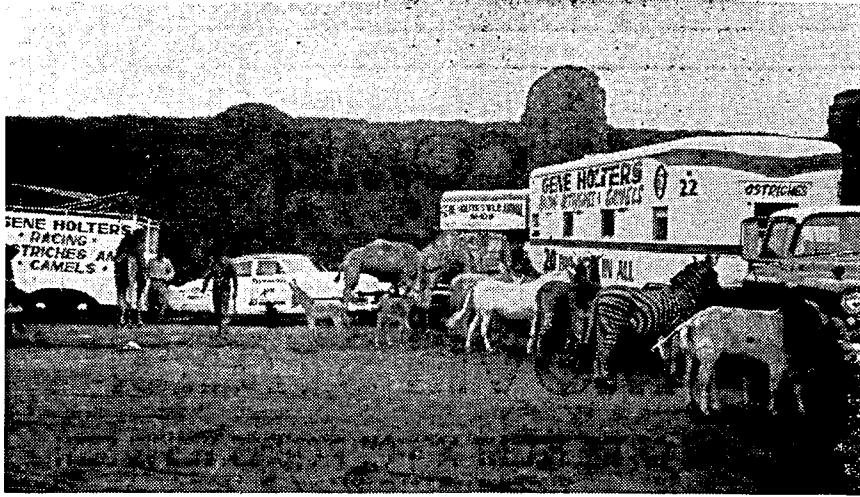
We played only two stands, Anchorage and Fairbanks. The show, this time, was too large and the overhead too high, to take it into the smaller towns. The next to the last day, between shows, A. W. and I gave a party for the youngsters who had helped us.

On closing night, we packed up as fast as we could, said our goodbyes, and hurried to the motel. We were determined to leave long before anyone else the next day, and stay ahead of the rest of them as long as we could. This was not because we liked to be in the lead, but past experience had taught us that if we had a flat tire, and on the Alcan Highway we had many, when one of Gene's trucks caught up with us, his men, with the equipment and the manpower they had, could do in just a few minutes what would take A. W. and me a considerable time to accomplish.

We left at four o'clock in the morning, long before the working crew had started to take down and load the big top, which, of course, took quite some time. Since we had encountered no difficulties so far, we were well ahead of everyone, and quite satisfied with our progress. We stopped that night at a motel that we had stopped at three times before. It was ideal for our purpose, as it had a barn and a corral where the ponies could be stabled for the night and stretch their legs.

At the break of dawn, we got up and went to the truck and let the dogs out for a run, and put the feed for the ponies in their mangers so they could munch on the way. We then returned the dogs to the cages and went to load the ponies. Where there should have been six ponies, we found only three. The three that were missing were all stallions. They worked in the act together, and were used to running in a corral; never before had they ever given any trouble.

As soon as daylight would permit, the pro-



proprietor of the motel, who was also a seasoned trapper, as one needs to be in that part of the country where the meat that they eat depends on it, went out to check on the trail that they would have had to leave behind.

It did not take him long to fit the pieces together and ascertain what had happened. During the night a herd of wild horses had come by, stopped for a drink at the lake which skirted his property and, out of curiosity and sensing the presence of other horses, had come by the corral. Since quite a number of mares were in the herd, that was all that was needed to excite the stallions to leap the fence and take off.

Unless one had ever experienced the vastness of a place like Alaska, they would be unable to realize the precarious position we were now in: these horses had been running free for a number of years and, as yet, no one had caught them, though, perhaps, they had not extended any great effort to do so.

While we were pondering our dilemma, first one and then another of Gene's trucks came by, then Gene himself. "Stay as long as it takes," he advised. "I will leave all of the necessary papers at the border to get you back into the United States." Suddenly, everyone was gone and we were alone.

Mail, in that far-out region, is delivered by helicopter. It was left at this motel, which was also the local post office and general store, the proprietor also being the postmaster. People would pick up their mail when they came in for groceries. Outposts such as this are to be found about one hundred miles apart on the Alcan Highway.

When the helicopter pilot delivered the mail this time, he received a rather peculiar request from the postmaster. They had a two-way radio communication system. When the pilot was back in the air, would he circle around a few times and see if he could spot a herd of running horses and ascertain if some ponies were running with them?

It did not take him long to spot them, as they were not yet too far away from the camp. Our host then had all of his available horses, which were rented out to hunters during the deer season, saddled up, and he then walked into the combination restaurant and bar and announced, "Mount up, boys, we are going hunting, and this time just for fun." After months of idleness, everyone was eager to join in the chase.

Meanwhile, overhead, the pilot, who should have been on and about his business, continued to give the exact location of the ponies, hovering over them. He seemed to be having a gay time doing something new and exciting for a change.

The runaways were brought back and, this time, tied in stalls. It was now too late to start out, so we waited until the next morning to continue on our way.

After stopping to pick up our house trailer in Canada, we continued on to Milwaukee,



A. W. Kennard working the Dorothy Herbert liberty ponies at the Milwaukee circus parade in 1971. Dorothy is standing at right watching. Bill Biggerstaff photo.

Wisconsin, where, as usual, Gene was furnishing the show and the animals for the street parade.

During the long ride down the Alcan Highway on the return trip to the United States, I had plenty of time to reminisce. I knew, instinctively, that this was to be my last tour. That chapter was about to end. I looked back into the past.

Before leaving the Ringling Bros. Circus, I had extracted a promise from Pat Valdo that he would see to it that Satan was taken care of. When I did not return to the show, he kept his word. Satan was turned out in a lovely pasture to spend the rest of his days, and no one ever rode him again. He had

more than paid into "equine security" enough to cover his retirement. When it came time to leave the circus for the last time and go to work at Bird Wonderland, knowing that he would not be happy with nothing to do and no horses to care for, I had

turned my ever-faithful Jimmy over to my good friend, Jack Gibson, who was then ring stock boss on the Clyde Beatty show. Jack looked after him all season like a mother hen with one baby chick, but Jimmy was now well along in years and, when the show closed, he went to live in the Veterans' Home in Los Angeles. He came to visit with me and spend the day quite often when I was at the bird farm in Encino. Then, one day, they called to tell me he would not be coming any more. He had gone to join the horses he had loved so very much.

One by one they seemed to come prancing by, in reverie, all of the horses that I had owned or ridden. Some to nod their head in recognition, others to drop to one knee and bow, in what I hoped with all my heart was affection. I looked up into the vastness of the sky, which is so awesome in the wilds of Alaska, and wondered if far away, up there, there might just be a place for them and me. If so, then we would all know there is a heaven after all. Not only for people, but animals as well.

When the Milwaukee date was over, we again went back to the forever-popular trained wild animal show. We continued to play fairs all the rest of the season. A lovely tour, with congenial people. I am glad that our last trip was filled with such pleasant memories. A grand family, the Holters.

At this time, the conclusion of my life story, I want to thank Evelyn Riker for re-typing my manuscript and Dale Riker for encouraging the *Bandwagon* to publish it.

Holiday Greetings

to all of my readers

Dorothy Herbert

Thank you for the many letters.

I am delighted to have shared my life story with all of you.

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and
Best Wishes for the
New Year*

Fred D. Pfening III
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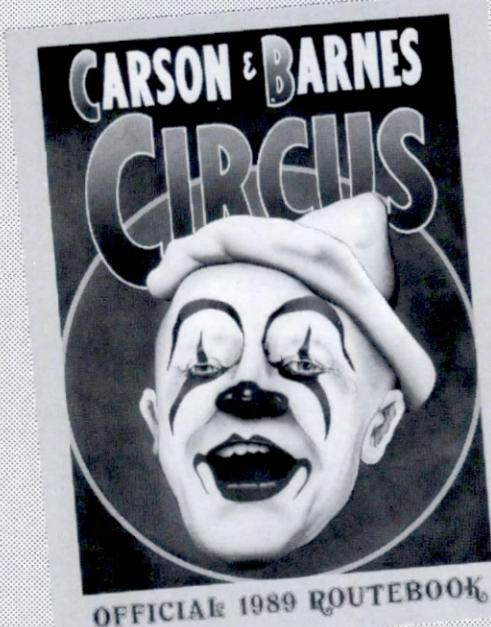
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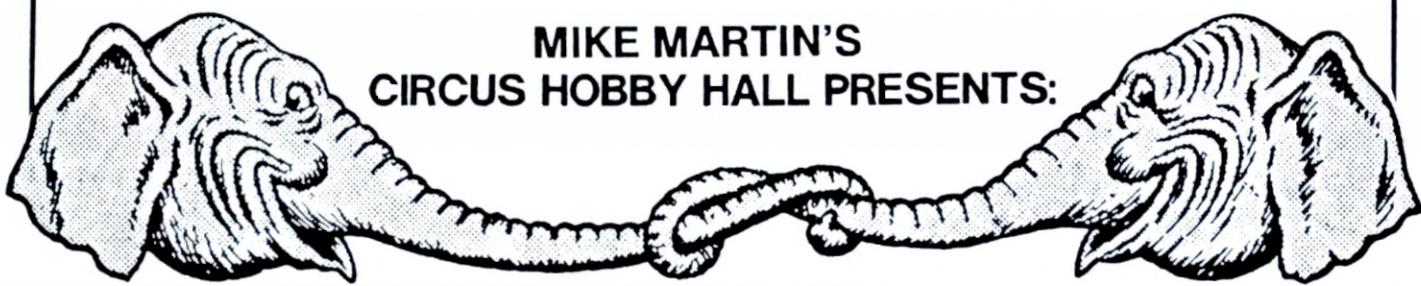


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TO ALL OUR CIRCUS AND CARNIVAL FRIENDS
AL and SHIRLEY STENCELL**

**Royal Bros. Circus Martin & Downs Circus
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ONLY BIG SHOW COMING

By Orin C. King

No Cursing and Swearing No Gambling Allowed

Thomas H. Davis, manager of transportation for Adam Forepaugh's New and Colossal All-Feature Show was in Topeka on August 17, conferring with railroad officials concerning facilities and excursion rates for exhibitions scheduled for Topeka on September 16.

Forepaugh in 1885 had an excellent press department and they did an outstanding job in preparing Topeka for the coming of the "Aristocratic Monarch of the Show World!" Five handouts appeared in the *Capital*; two in the *Commonwealth*; four in the *Journal*; and two in the North Topeka *Mail*. In addition to pre-show publicity, the press department also furnished the reviews appearing in the *Capital* and the *Commonwealth* following the exhibitions. Newspaper advertising began in the *Journal* September 9 with ads on six following dates. The *Capital* carried five ads; the *Commonwealth*, four; and two in the *Mail*.

The handouts were little more than claims to huge-ness and superiority with little information concerning the actual show. The most interesting of the handouts appeared in the *Journal*, September 4, and verges on satire:

"AN UNTAMED TIGER."

"Adam Forepaugh last season received late in the fall and through the English port at Montreal, a tremendous Bengal tiger, which had been captured only a few months previous. The natives in Bengal state that he had destroyed and devoured fifty or more people, and two entire families who resided near his native jungle. He seemed to bear a charmed life and could be exterminated with neither spear nor bullet. He was finally caught in a huge trap, bound with ropes and thongs and forced into a strong cage, in which he was imported and sold to Mr. Forepaugh. Greater reason is apparent that the stories told are truthful, for since confined in the menagerie among other tigers of a less fierce aspect, he has torn the

Copyright 1988 Orin Copple King

arms and shoulders and dangerously wounded two employees through the steel bars of his lair, and no man can be found among the several experienced and courageous wild beast trainers with the show brave enough to enter his den and face him. They believe he can never be subdued. This fierce beast, with all the other marvels of the famous Forepaugh show will be exhibited here Wednesday, September 16."

Heading the features in the newspaper ads

and Quadrille. Elephants in an amusing Tuneful Musical Dance."

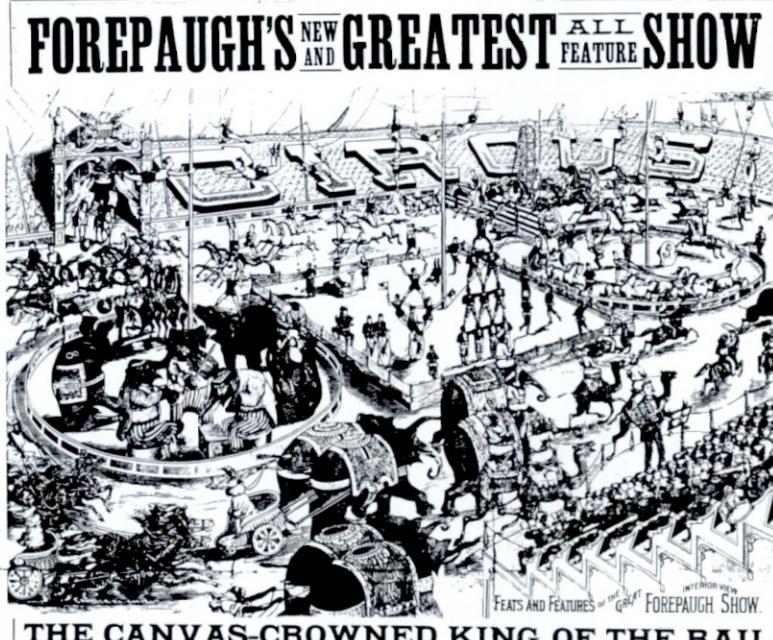
The greatest elephant feature, totally unexplained, was the "Mid-air Bicycle Elephant Wonder!" A less wonderous elephant was shown in a cut pedalling a tricycle in a race with a man on a high-wheeler--and winning.

"THE SUN-DAZZLING AND GOLD-GLITTERING PAGEANT," on the public streets at 10 a.m. on show day still featured "LALLA ROOKH'S DEPARTURE FROM DELHI, AND CLEOPATRA IN HER BARGE OF BEATEN GOLD."

Admission 50 cents. Children under 9 years 25 cents. The show claimed seating for 20,000.

The aggregation arrived in Topeka in three sections, coming from Lawrence on the Union Pacific, and quickly moved to the lot adjoining the Santa Fe depot. Thousands saw the parade and, according to the *Capital*, "The attendance at the afternoon performance was the largest ever gathered beneath a canvas in Topeka, and in the evening the multitude was almost as great."

The preceding quote is from a review written by C. A. Davis, press agent, who called on all the newspapers on show day and was lauded by the editors as a gentleman and a talented journalist, an opinion upheld in every Kansas town where the show ap-



This drawing of a performance covered half of the back page of the Adam Forepaugh courier used in 1885. Pfening Archives.

were the exploits of 25 elephants, some of whose tricks are hard to believe, and others that were certainly exaggerated: "An Elephant traverses a suspended wire. An elephant with boxing gloves knocks out a great pugilist. An elephant perplexes and cunningly outwits his tutor. Elephants in ingeniously contrived Obelisk-high Pyramids. Elephants in Broad Sword Combats and Battle Scenes. Elephants marching in Squadrons and Military Drill. Elephants whirling in the Waltz

peared.

While in Topeka the English members of the show were saddened by the news of Jumbo's death in St. Thomas, Ontario, when struck by a train on the 15th, and Forepaugh's big elephant, Bolivar, succeeded to the title of the largest animal on the North American continent. Bolivar soon made news of his own.

Forepaugh's herd was chained in a line on the show grounds when a group of boys found sport in teasing the animals with sticks, stones, handfuls of grass, watermelon and watermelon laced with chewing tobacco. The bull handlers repeatedly drove the boys away and warned them of the danger, but the

The "mid-air bicycle elephant" was pictured in newspaper advertisements as a 1885 Adam Forepaugh Circus feature. Pfening Archives.

boys enjoyed the elephants' anger and kept up their harassment.

One boy about ten years old, Bernard Dreyer, who was braver, or slower than the other boys, selected Bolivar for his special target. Bolivar saw his opportunity when Bernard came to close. In some accounts Bolivar merely zapped the boy with his trunk. Other accounts related that Bolivar grabbed him with his trunk and threw him fifteen feet with great force.

The result was one badly battered boy. M. V. Magee and Officer Dovovan took the boy to his home at First and Monroe Streets in an express wagon. Drs. J. W. Redden and J. P. Lewis were sent for. The doctors reported a broken leg, a dislocated shoulder and dislocated ligaments and tendons.

Bernard was the son of Herman Dreyer, a cabinet maker. The elder Dreyer offered to settle for \$3,500, but Forepaugh thought the amount too high, considering that the boy brought the trouble upon himself by disregarding the orders of the show personnel. Dreyer then enlisted attorneys Joseph G. Waters and A. H. Chase, and a suit was filed immediately in superior court seeking \$20,000 damages. The show property was attached.

It was due to the efforts of Allen Sells that the show was released from attachment and permitted to leave town. At the next town, Clay Center, Waters and Chase filed another attachment. Forepaugh had scheduled two weeks of exhibitions in Kansas and the attorneys promised to make trouble in every town until settlement was made.

Topeka banker John R. Mulvane with Allen Sells as surety, wired a Clay Center bank to post bond for Forepaugh. In the meantime, Forepaugh's lawyers, Rossington, Smith and Dallas and Eugene Hagan, obtained an injunction preventing additional suits. Sells committed himself as surety in the amount of \$40,000, and it was this action that enabled Forepaugh to play his dates.

The *Journal* in an editorial of September 20, commented, "Allen Sells deserves credit for the way he has come to the relief of Adam Forepaugh. When the suit was commenced by Mr. Dreyer, against Forepaugh for the injuries done to his boy by the elephant Bolivar, the people regard it as the right thing to do, but when the Forepaugh circus is followed around the state, and harassed with suits and attachments, simply for



BICYCLE, UNICYCLE AND TRICYCLE CONTESTS;

the purpose of harassing Mr. Forepaugh, and forcing him to pay out money whether he in justice ought to or not, it begins to look to the people more like blackmail than it does the practice of law, had it not have been for the prompt action of Allen Sells of this city, these actions against Mr. Forepaugh might have seriously embarrassed him."

A paragraph in the *Capital* of December 22, marked the end of the dispute: "Bernard Dreyer, the boy who was hurt by Forepaugh's elephant 'Bolivar' last summer when the Forepaugh show was here, and brought suit against Forepaugh for \$20,000 has compromised with the showman." No details of the settlement were recorded.

Among the Kansas towns played by Forepaugh in 1885 were the following: September 15, Lawrence; September 16, Topeka; September 17, Clay Center; September 18, Salina; September 19, McPherson; September 21, Beloit; September 22, Abilene; September 23, Junction City; September 24, Emporia; September 25, Newton; September 28, Wellington; September 29, Winfield; September 30, Independence; October 1, Parsons; October 2, Joplin, Mo.; October 3, Ft. Scott.

The Clay Center *Dispatch* carried a report on the exhibitions of September 17 that echoed the style of press agent C. A. Davis and surely was a piece of his work: "Forepaugh has come and gone and with him several hundred 'pieces of silver.' The opinion generally expressed is that the show is about all that is claimed for it. Certain it is that for novelties of performance and wonderful surprises it is ahead of anything we've ever seen. Every man connected with it as an officer or employee, seems to act as though old man Forepaugh's reputation as the leading showman of the country was resting upon his shoulders. They are all courteous, genteel and obliging. Their patronage here was large, and their merits justly earned it."

Davis was with the show when it ap-

peared in Beloit, on September 21, and the *Gazette* in reviewing the show remarked that, "While the show in all its details was more than first-class in every particular, another that was very agreeable to those who were brought in business contact with them was that every man connected therewith, as employee, attaches, or in any way was, in all his business relations, a perfect gentleman, and seemed to feel that a portion, at least, of the responsibility for the credit of old man Forepaugh's show rested directly upon their shoulders, and they were determined to see that no act of theirs should diminish its glory."

With Davis on the job "old man Forepaugh's" reputation was beyond harm. The *Gazette* expressed its indebtedness to Davis "for courtesies which were highly appreciated."

The *Gazette* on the 25th was bursting with circus news.

"Our merchants report a big trade on circus day.

This drawing of Bolivar, the mastodon, was used in 1885 Adam Forepaugh Circus newspaper ads, heralds and couriers. It was more than a slight exaggeration. Pfening Archives.

BOLIVAR · LARGEST & HEAVIEST ELEPHANT IN THE WORLD.



"Everybody was in town Monday. The day was beautiful, and the crowd immense.

"Republic, Jewell, Smith, Lincoln, Cloud and Ottawa counties were represented at the circus Monday."

"An excursion train of five coaches, containing over 400 people, came up from Greenleaf (about 80 miles) and intervening towns, to take in the circus.

"A Cawker City delegation of over a hundred, headed by McBride of the *Journal*, and Frank Leggett, came down to see the circus.

"A fireman on the Forepaugh special trains, had his hand caught between the bumpers, at the depot Sunday morning, and badly hurt. Dr. Galber amputated a finger, and sent him to the U. P. hospital, at Kansas City.

"There were no accidents or rows of any kind on the day of the circus (Monday), and, considering that on said day there was a bigger crowd of people in Beloit than ever known on any previous occasion, it speaks well for the good behaviour of all."

Following the exhibitions at Emporia on September 24, the *Weekly News* ran several short paragraphs relating to various aspects of the Forepaugh show without mentioning any sources of information:

"Forepaugh's daily expenses average \$2,500.

"Including the advance force there are 532 people connected with the show.

"One of Adam Forepaugh's best ring horses was killed here Thursday by falling from a car.

"The elephants, horses, camels and other hay-eating animals consume four tons of hay a day.

"The horses ridden by Miss Lizzie Rolland is called the best ring horse in the country. It is valued at \$3,000.

"Thursday Adam Forepaugh and his leading showmen called upon Mrs. Walkup at the court house and extended their sympathies." There was no explanation of Mrs. Walkup's troubles.

The main review of the show was nearly a column in length and was the work of the obliging Mr. Davis, dealing in generalities that would be appropriate for any stand along the entire season's route.

The *Sumner County Standard*, Wellington, speaking of the exhibitions of September 28, estimated that "the crowd in town Monday to see the great Forepaugh circus, was the largest ever congregated here at one time."

And, "Mr. Davis, the press agent with Forepaugh's show is one of the most gentle and clever men it has ever been our lot to deal with in that line."

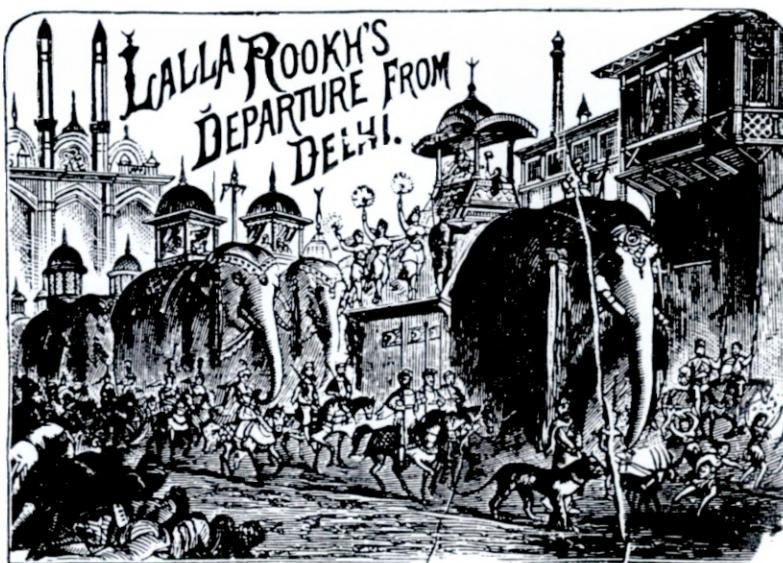
The *Star and Kansan*, Independence, concerning the exhibitions of September 30, reported that "Forepaugh's great moral show was delayed in getting here last Wednesday by the derailment of a car between Elk Falls

arrived in the city at an early hour Thursday morning, when the circus property was immediately transferred to the grounds just south of the Third ward public school building. Many people visited the grounds during the afternoon, and viewed with interest the erection of the tents, feeding of the animals, etc. Manager Forepaugh directs the show in person, and was warmly welcomed by his old friends here yesterday. Always a favorite

in this city, Forepaugh has added to the esteem in which he is held here by the splendid attractions he presented his patrons yesterday. The parade was one of the finest spectacular displays ever seen in the west, and was a fitting prelude to the novel and brilliant arenic and zoological features exhibited under the imposing tents. The show throughout bears the stamp of originality, and is a wide and complete departure from the conventional circus. Not alone is the show rich in novel arenic attractions, but the museum and menagerie departments abound with the rarest and unique curios and zoologi-

cal specimens attainable. From the massive 'Bolivar' down to the diminute baby monkey every animal possess an unusual degree of attractiveness. The ring performances are of

superlative excellence. Everything runs with clock-like precision, and the smoothness and artistic finish of the ensemble is particularly pleasing. Many entirely new and sensational acts are given, but our limited space deters a detailed mention of them all. For pure hair-raising and blood-curdling purposes the performance of the young Russian woman, Mlle. Kabowls, is eminently suitable. Ascending a pyramid of tables thirty feet in height, she fearlessly plunges headlong to the stage beneath, turning a somersault and changing her attire while whirling through the air. Not only once did she execute this remarkable feat, but repeats it several times. Another big sensation, but of a more humorous type, is the boxing bout between a pugilistic elephant, fittingly called 'Sullivan,' and Adam Forepaugh, Jr. Although 'Addie' showed up in excellent form, and displayed no little proficiency in the use of the mittens, yet the long swinging blows of Mr. Elephant de Sullivan was too much for him to cope with. It is an infinitely amusing act, and always elicits storms of applause. The intrepid aerial act of the 'Human Meteors,' Dunbar and Vernon; the peerless bareback equestrian displays of Madam Rolland, Miss Lizzie Rolland, Jean Irvine and George Rolland; the picturesque acrobatic act of the La Martine brothers, who appeared in full evening



An artist's rendition of Forepaugh's Lalla Rookh's Departure From Delhi. Pfening Archives.

and Longton, and instead of arriving at half-past three did not get in until 10. The crowd that had assembled to witness the parade at half-past nine waited very patiently until one for the spectacle.

"A lunch room and dining hall was conducted by the ladies of the M. E. church in the store room just vacated by Church & Batt, on circus day. About forty dollars was realized."

Independence was a satisfactory day for Forepaugh and, in the estimation of the *Star and Kansan*, "the receipts of Forepaugh's show here last Wednesday were more than four thousand dollars."

Frequent mention has been made of the work C. A. Davis, press agent extraordinary, and to display his skill is quoted below in its entirety his description of circus day in Parsons October 1:

"FAMOUS FOREPAUGH
"The Veteran Sawdust Impressario
"Meets With A Fine Reception
"Here Last Week

"Novel and Brilliant Performances Afternoon and Night--Some of the Thrilling and Attractive Features of the Show.

"Adam Forepaugh's three monster trains

dress, a la Craggs; the elastic evolutions of the Majiltons; the amazing juggling of a simeon pure 'Jap' Heussaburro Sam, and his American partner, Shattuck, together with the almost human performance of the herd of elephants, under the direction of the foremost living elephant trainer, Adam Forepaugh, Jr., are other noteworthy features of the elaborate programme. Strange as it may seem, the 'business' of the two principal clowns, Billy Rollins and 'Charley' McCarty, was strikingly free from 'chestnuts.' The hippodrome races were given with a spirit that challenged unstinted applause. All the realism of a veritable race course pervaded these contests, and they completely eclipse any similar display ever seen in this city. Prof. A. E. Menter's military band was an important factor in contributing to the pleasure of the audience.

The Forepaugh show is remarkably free from the usual contingent of hangers-on, who ply their skin games on the unsophisticated, circus days, under various guises. Forepaugh keeps one of Pinkerton's most skilled detectives constantly with the show, and it is principally due to his vigilance that the disreputable followers are conspicuous by their absence. The Forepaugh management have succeeded in imprisoning or driving away all questionable characters except a combination of three persons, a one-legged man, and two women, who have been following up the show all summer. The male member of this trio masquerades as a balloon peddler, but his real business is that of steerer for confidence games. Thus far the show detective has been unable to fasten a case upon him, owing to the reluctance of victims to appear in court. The two women operate a hand organ, although the younger sometimes joins her one-legged companion in peddling toy balloons. The older of the two women is said to be a veritable Tartar. She has amassed considerable property at Minneapolis, Minn., and is notorious in the big cities as a professional beggar. The Forepaugh people are especially wrathful at these parties from the fact that they encourage thieves, fakirs, beggars and prostitutes to follow the show, furnishing them with information as to the movements of the circus, etc. This professional beggar nuisance ought to be set down upon, and the citizens and police along the route of the show should be on their guard against this unsavory trio."

S. H. Barrett's New United Monster Railroad Shows, Triple Circus, World's Menagerie, Museum of Living Wonders, Elevated stage and Grand Racing Carnival, "A Consolidated Colossal Creation," came to Kansas in 1885 with an outstanding group of performers headed by the immortal James Robinson, "The Most Fearless, Dashing and Daring Bareback Rider in the world, whose Name has been sounded in both hemispheres by the Trumpet-Tongue of Fame."

Among the Kansas towns which saw the glory of the Barrett show were: May 22, Winfield; May 23, Harper; May 25, Wellington; May 27, Newton; May 28, Hutchinson; May 29, Great Bend; May 30, Dodge City.

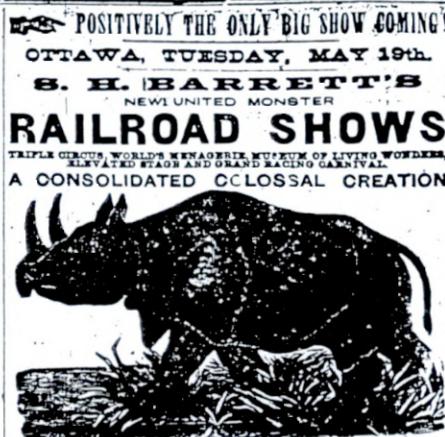
The Barrett aggregation had the benefit of the Sells Brothers press department and the handouts run in the Kansas papers have a professional polish matched by few traveling shows. The Barrett circus was the number two show of the Sells brothers.

A handout in the Harper *Graphic* on May 13 heralding the exhibitions of May 23 made no attempt to conceal the merits and the size of the Barrett show.

S. H. BARRETT'S NEW UNITED MONSTER RAILROAD SHOWS

"The above named monster confederation of mammoth railroad shows will exhibit at Harper on Saturday, May 23rd, in all its gigantic completeness and immensity, and with two hundred first-class, all superior stars, led by Mr. Jas. Robinson, the world's champion bareback rider, who leaves retirement, wealth and luxury for a farewell season, with fame equal to Ceasar's. We are pleased to be able to state that this is acknowledged by all the big show of the world to-day--the very largest, the very choicest and the very best. It is also the newest, the brightest and the most original, and has a greater collection of ani-

S. H. Barrett Circus newspaper ad used in Ottawa, Kansas in 1885. Kansas Historical Society.



OPENING A NEW AND WONDERFUL VISTA OF THE MOST MAGNIFICENT FEATURES OF THE SHOW WORLD.

In its entirety the Most Complete on Earth. Embodying in an Overpowering Unity many Great Shows contained in one, each separately forming a Grand Show in itself, while all combine in completeness.

THE GRANDEST OF AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISES

A Perpetual Round of Pleasure. From Four to Six Acts at one and the same time. Equestrian, Gymnastic, Aerobic, Contortionistic, Aerial and Athletic, presented by a collection of the world's very best Artists, TWO HUNDRED IN NUMBER, radiant with such names as

MR. JAMES ROBINSON

The Most Fearless, Dashing and Daring Bareback Rider in the world, whose Name has been sounded in both hemispheres by the Trumpet-Tongue of Fame.

MISS EMMA LAKE

A Most Graceful and Charming Lady Equestrian, whose Performances in the Side-Saddle on the backs of her Trained Steeds are actually a Poem in Motion.

ANDY SWEENEY

The Hercules of the Arena.

MR. ROBERT STICKNEY

The Most Intrepid, Courageous and Marvelous BACHEM OF THE SADDLE, General Athlete and Versatile Artist in the world.

FRANK ASHTON & MADAME TUONSHA

Aerial Ring Artists.

PRIMROSE AND PICKETT

mate and inanimate wonders beneath its canvas than any other ten shows traveling. Every zone--yes, every continent--has contributed to its wonderful collection. It has a menagerie unexcelled in general and wonderful features. The largest living elephant, 'Xerxes,' whose weight is over ten tons; the only living giant hippopotamus in the world; the only living pair of black tigers; the only living two-horned white rhinoceros, and a thousand glittering generalities as yet beyond our ken, but surely to be seen by us. It has two hundred first-class star performers, in their wonderful arenic exhibition, a great elevated stage, and a wonderful racing carnival, and--well, in a word, it has a thousand new features, which, from their strange and startling nature, justly entitle it to the euphonious cognomen of 'The Greatest Show on Earth.'"

Among the "two hundred" performers, in addition to Robinson, were the following who were mentioned in the newspaper ads:

MISS EMMA LAKE. "A Most Graceful and Charming Lady Equestrian, whose Performances in the Side-Saddle on the backs of her Trained Steeds are actually a Poem in Motion."

ANDY SWEENEY. "The Hercules of the Arena."

MR. ROBERT STICKNEY. "The Most Intrepid, Courageous and Marvelous SAMACHEM OF THE SADDLE, General Athlete and Versatile Artist in the World."

FRANK ASHTON AND MADAME TUONSHA. "Aerial Ring Artists."

PRIMROSE AND PICKETT. "High Trap-zeists and Their 20--Double Somersaults--20."

MISS POLLIE LEE. "The Equestrian Juggler, A Charming and Beautiful Lady Rider, who is a Perfect Model of Excellence in Aesthetic Equestrianism."

GEORGE ZURELLA AND EMMA DU BOIS. "High Wire Bicycle Artists."

PROF. JOSEPH BARRES. "And his Wonderful DOG CIRCUS."

MR. JAMES STOW. "Equestrian Director and Wonderful Horse Rider."

BRAZIL BROTHERS. "Wonderful Acrobats."

LEOPOLD BROTHERS. "Acrobats and Gymnasts."

THE ROYAL JAPANESE CIRCUS. "Under the immediate supervision of Prince KOKIN-SEG-A-WAO, by permission of the MIKADO, consisting of VARIOUS TROUPES OF JAPANESE ARTISTS, in Sword-Walking, Balancing and Equilibristic Feats, unequalled anywhere in the world."

The menagerie was advertised as having, "The only Pair of COAL BLACK TIGERS ever exhibited; a GROUP OF GRACEFUL GIRAFFES; and The Only Giant Two-Horned Sumatran RHINOCEROS EVER SEEN." The largest type in the menagerie section was reserved for "the Giant Elephant XERXES, Whose weight exceeds Ten Tons,

and who carries a Band of Twenty Musicians Upon His Massive Back."

In addition to all of the above, Barrett presented "A MONSTER ARABIAN CIRCUS and a COMPLETE WILD WILDERNESS SHOW."

The *Graphic* published a flippant review following the exhibitions: "Yesterday S. H. Barrett's numerous shows, exhibited in this city. The sun rose on a clear, blue sky, indicating a beautiful spring day, causing the attendance to be large. Our city soon put on a holiday appearance, the people coming in from all directions soon crowding the streets. The 'soap racket' man, with an honest countenance and hard cheek, appeared upon Central avenue and threw his oratorical wind bellows in gear, and informed the public that there was 'millions in it,' and many there were who plucked the unforbidden fruit, 'soap' wrapped up in chromos, every piece. It was the soap he was introducing (Kirke's laundry); any money found inside belonged to the man that bought it, but it was principally soap. Occasionally the color of money was seen; all right, anyway, soap at \$2.50 a pinch is cheap enough these bilious times.

"The all gold jewelry racket man soon joined the circle, unbuttoned his gall and let his electrified jaw loose, which rattled like a hotel window in a stormy night; he threw double-breasted gold watch chains away that were fully worth four dollars and a half each in the far west, but in New York they sell at about ten cents a dozen. He gave the boys a dollar apiece for them back, then the boys bought them from him again at a dollar. Everybody was having lots of fun, but finally the boys had the chains and the sublimely innocent man has the money.

"The circus parade was good. The trainer sat in the lion's den as usual, but had they been goats he would have been bucked clear through the roof of the cage. The steam caliope sang 'Mary's Little Lamb' in such a melting manner that it made our devil cry.

"There was one feature of the day that was very gratifying to us indeed--the ladies stood in the shadow, and special care of the GRAPHIC, while the men were purchasing soap. The show was well attended, and criticized pro and con by the audience."

Advertising for the Wellington date of May 25, began in the *Sumner County Standard* on May 2, with an ad that proclaimed "WAIT FOR THE BIG SHOW! No big show at Wellington UNTIL MONDAY, MAY 25." The reason for the "Wait" advertising was the coming of Col. Giles' Great World's Fair May 6. The "Wait" campaign as in most such battles, was wasted time and money, for the *Standard* reported after Giles had come and gone that, "The circus was fairly patronized both afternoon and evening."

An interesting tie-in was made with merchant Louis Elbinger of the Famous store.



Sheldon H. Barrett brother in law of the Sells brothers and manager of the circus bearing his name. Al Conover collection.

Every purchaser of \$5.00 worth of goods received a free ticket to the Barrett show. A purchase of \$10 received two tickets. Every five dollar increase in the purchase merited another circus ticket. The deal was highly beneficial for the store which disposed of "about 500 tickets," according to the *Standard*.

In reviewing the exhibitions, the *Standard* commented that, "They merited all that has been said in their favor."

The exhibitions at Great Bend on May 29, were given under adverse weather conditions. The *Great Bend Register* reported that: "The weather in the afternoon was unpropitious and the efforts of Mr. Barrett's people to give a good entertainment was almost a failure. The horses slipped and slid around, the clowns rolled in the mud, and the acrobats were forced to cut their part of the show short. Mr. Barrett has in his company the best of artists and would with half a chance give one of the best shows on the road. The attendance was not large on account of the recent rains and the uncertainty of the people from the country being able to come to the show and get back home again without a thorough drenching. Those who did attend expressed themselves well satisfied and were loud in their praises of the company's efforts to please them under great disadvantages."

The *Dodge City Democrat* had not enough interest in the Barrett show to express any opinion of the exhibitions given on May 30, nor were there any comments on the parade or the size of the crowds. The only mention of the show day appeared in the *Democrat* of June 6, when it reported that, "Quite an excitement was created on the show grounds last Saturday night by the disappearance of a little boy belonging to a German family of this city. The father and mother were almost crazed with grief, and accused the show peo-

ple of stealing him. Assistant Marshall Daniels soon found the little fellow who had started home and got into a neighbors house and gone to sleep."

Also, on the night of the exhibitions, while the show was loading out, the safe in the post office was robbed of over \$500. The door was blown off the safe and the sound was heard by several citizens, but, almost miraculously, no one accused the show people of the burglary.

* * * * *

The death of Jumbo made news all over the world, for no animal had ever captured the imagination of the public to the extent that Jumbo did. The Barnum and London press department flooded the papers with Jumbo's "bravery," but none of the stories could equal the maudlin tale prepared for children. Barnum had a publication for boys and girls and the Jumbo story was a feature picked up by the *Topeka Mail*, and published October 2.

"Poor Jumbo!

"Thousands of our boys and girls have gazed with wide-eyed wonder on Jumbo, the biggest elephant that was ever in America. He was eleven and one-half feet high. If you were to take a very tall man and stand him upon the shoulders of another tall man the top of his head would not reach up to Jumbo's. He weighed 14,000 pounds. He used to eat every day 400 pounds of hay, a barrel of potatoes and one whole bushel of onions. How his breath must have smelled!

"But that was not all. Jumbo wasn't a temperance elephant. He would drink a pailful of beer every night. His keeper, Scott, drank a little of it, but Jumbo swallowed nearly all. After that, with the beer and onions both inside of him, he had a breath to be sure. He was very fond of his beer, was Jumbo, and refused to go to sleep without it. He traveled in a great box car, so high that it just cleared railway tunnels. In this car the great beast ate and slept, and Scott, his keeper, slept there, too. One night, for some reason, Scott did not give Jumbo his pail of beer, but lay down and went to sleep. Jumbo waited a good while. He pawed and fussed uneasily with his trunk. But Scott slept away and never minded. Jumbo wasn't going to be put off, though. At last, seeing the keeper did not seem about to stir, he curled his great trunk about him and suddenly brought him up standing upon his feet. He did not hurt him in the least, only waked him and put him upon his feet very gently. This was to remind Scott that Jumbo could not go to sleep without his drink.

"You see from the picture how big Jumbo was, compared to the man who stands beside him. His tough, heavy hide looked like dried, wrinkled mud. When he appeared in any town Mr. Barnum usually let him march along the streets in the procession. Then the boys and girls would race themselves out of breath following him up to get sight of him.

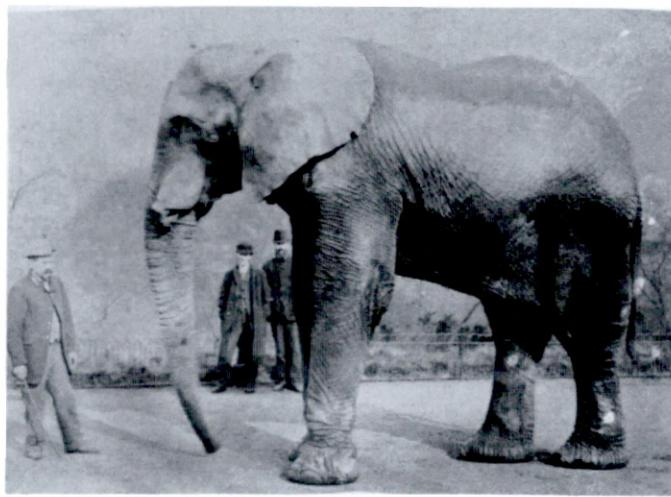
His back moved along on a level with the second story windows of some houses. When he lifted his trunk it was twenty-six feet high, up to the roofs of many of the houses. Near his head this tremendous trunk was as large around as a man's body.

"But now nobody will ever see poor Jumbo alive again.

"He was killed by a railway engine up at St. Thomas, Ont., in Canada, on the 15th of September. The true story of his death is a very touching one. You will think more of Jumbo than ever when you hear that he lost his life saving that of another elephant, a little fellow who belonged to the show.

"The circus had been exhibiting in St. Thomas, and they were getting ready to go away. Keeper Scott led Jumbo and the small elephant along the car tracks towards the circus train. The little one's name was Tom Thumb. As they were just on the track the keeper saw a freight train coming directly down on them. On one side were some cars that had been switched off upon a side track. Upon the other was an embankment ten feet down. The only way to save the giant beast was to make him go down the embankment. The keeper tried to do this. But Jumbo would not budge, although he knew that he was in danger. He merely looked around to see what had become of Tom, the baby elephant. Tom was some distance behind. The splendid old fellow determined to save Tom at any rate. He turned back and caught the little elephant in his trunk, lifted him high in the air, and threw him out of danger, beyond the cars, tracks and all.

"Tom fell upon the safe, open ground, the keeper said, whining like a puppy dog with a sore foot. The fall hurt him, but it did not injure him seriously. He was saved. But alas for Jumbo! When he had thrown Tom over the cars upon the side track he turned to save himself. But he was too late. The engine struck him and carried him along. His great body was squeezed between it and the freight cars upon the side track. The crush was terrible. Jumbo's weight was so great that it knocked both the engine and the cars on the opposite side from the track. The keeper said he was in a rage when he saw the engine coming, and made a motion at it with his head, as if to butt it off the track. But it struck him on the head, too. His monstrous tusks had been sawed off, so that only the stumps of them remained. The engine struck these first and drove them into



Barnum's mighty Jumbo with his trainer Matthew Scott. Pfening Archives.

his head, fracturing his skull. The noble brute had more brains than some men. How many men would have saved the life of another first! Jumbo was carried along in this horrible manner for a hundred yards, they said. He roared with the terrible pain, and poor little Tom roared and howled, too, along with his old friend. But it was all over with the brave giant. In three minutes he rolled over upon his back and died in agony, Poor Jumbo!

"So large was this great creature that some scientific men said he was not an elephant at all, but a mastodon. This was a mammoth beast that lived on the earth before the time of history, or of man, as we know him. But there are no more mastodons left now, unless Jumbo was one. He was 26 years old and was still growing.

"The engineer of the train that killed him is blamed very much. It is thought he was dozing, or not paying attention to his business, since he did not try to stop the cars.

"Mr. Barnum will have the skin stuffed and mounted and exhibited with his show

Jumbo after being hit by a train in St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada on September 15, 1885. Pfening Archives.



next summer. But boys and girls all over the country will be almost sorry enough to cry, to think he met his death in such a sad way."

* * * *

The season of 1884 came to an end for James T. Johnson and Company's Great Western Circus with an exhibition at Scranton, Kansas--evening only--on October 13, following which Johnson settled down to spend the winter among the people of Scranton. News of the winter is scarce and comes entirely from the papers of nearby towns. On December 4, the Osage City *Free Press* reported that "Mr. Johnson, the circus man, is building a skating rink (in Scranton) opposite Dr. Gidding's drug store," and on January 1 of the new year--1885--noted that "the skating rink is being well patronized by our people."

There are no other reports until the following appeared in the *Osage County Chronicle*, Burlingame of May 28. "Notes from GNIX. Scranton, Kansas, May 18th, 1885. James T. Johnson & Co's great western circus leaves this place today. They have wintered here and will return about November 1." There is no mention of the opening performance, but it is a safe assumption that the first exhibitions were made in Scranton, for Johnson was forever short of money and might have needed funds to get out of town.

Johnson's relationship with the people of Scranton is unknown, but a statement in the *Chronicle*, June 4, indicates a situation less than satisfactory. "Johnson with his circus outfit has gone and for our moral benefit it is to be hoped that he will not return." In his early years Johnson featured heavy graft on the Great Western, but for a few years past he had run a "Sunday school" show, boasting of the absence of gamblers and thieves. The complaint of the *Chronicle* might be based on nothing more than violation of the Sabbath for Burlingame and Scranton were strongholds of fundamentalist religion.

In any event there exists no confirmation for the supposition that Johnson opened the season in the village of Scranton. The site of the first road date is also unknown, but it was not Osage City, Burlingame or Eskridge, all nearby towns.

The first documented appearance was May 20 at Alma on a lot south of the Chicago lumber yard. The Alma *Enterprise* had little to say about the show, restricting its enthusiasm to four short sentences. "The circus has come and gone. Like all wagon shows it was very thin," and, "The circus did not take any great amount of wealth out of the town. It was patronized according to its size."

Johnson had a remarkable season in 1885, which included the following towns: May 20, Alma; May 22, St. Marys; May 30, Leonardville; June 1, Green; June 8, Wayne; June 10, Scandia; June 12, Jamestown; June 17, Downs; June 18, Osborne; June 20, Alton; June 22, Cedarville; June 23, Gaylord; June 24, Harlan; June 25, Smith Centre; June 27, Kirwin; June 30, Phillipsburg; July 1, Long Island (Evening only); July 4, Red Cloud, NE.

For two of the above dates Johnson was in opposition to Col. Giles' Great World's Fair. Giles billed Alma for May 27, a week behind Johnson; and at St. Marys Giles came in six days behind Johnson, who booked the town for Friday, May 22. The only mention of the Johnson show was one paragraph in the St. Marys *Express* the day before the exhibitions, stating, "Jas. T. Johnston's (sic) circus will exhibit here on Friday, May 22. The tents will be erected on the fair grounds, which are convenient to the city. After the exhibitions the *Express* made no mention of the Great Western.

Johnson advertised sparingly in newspapers, rarely using a display ad. Only by searching the news columns for small notices such as the one quoted above can one trace the route of the Johnson show. Once a date has been discovered there ensues a casting about among nearby towns for a clue to the following day's performances, a procedure time consuming and wearying, but also spiced with lightening flashes of discovery.

Leonardville, which boasted a population of "over 400," was played on May 30. T. B. Sadler, press agent, caused to be inserted in a news column of the Leonardville *Monitor* of May 28 a promise which appeared in nearly every town that Johnson billed: "The press agent of Johnson & Co.'s Circus desires us to assure our readers that this show is not accompanied by a gang of sharpers and swindlers as was the case with other shows which have been here." Most country papers charged five cents a line for such insertions.

In another column the *Monitor* carried the following handout:

"JAS. T. JOHNSON & CO'S. CIRCUS

"Mr. Tom Sadler, the press agent of this company, was here Friday completing arrangements for the appearance on May 30th of this popular show. Col. Johnson is the pioneer showman of Ks., having exhibited at St. Mary's Mission to the Indians, as long ago as 1859. His past record as a favorite caterer to the public taste is a sure guarantee of what we may expect from him when he exhibits in our town next Saturday."

A free act was offered twice a day featuring Johnson's small daughter, La Petite Ella, who "will ascend a wire from the ground to the Center Pole. No Postponement on account of weather. All are invited."

After the show had come and gone the

Coming—All Hail to the Chief—Coming!

James T. Johnson & Co.'s

GREAT WESTERN CIRCUS!

—AND—

MUSEUM of LIVING WONDERS.

The most complete and excellent of all tented exhibitions, replete with unique marvels, and gigantic sensations.

Always



Better

the

than

Best

Ever!

25 Star Performers; Dens of Wild Beasts; Doves of Trained Ponies; Intelligent Fine Horses; Troupes of Leapers, Acrobats, Contortionists, Gymnasts and Riders.

Free Exhibition every day at 1 and 7 p. m., when LaPetite ELLA will make an ascension on a single Wire, from the Ground to top of the Center Pole.

Cedarville, Monday, June 22d, Gaylord, Tuesday, June 23d, Harlan, Wednesday, June 24th, Smith Center, Thursday, June 25th.

DON'T FORGET DATES:

Cedarville, Monday, June 22d, Gaylord, Tuesday, June 23d, Harlan, Wednesday, June 24th, Smith Center, Thursday, June 25th.

Popular Prices of Admission

ON DECK FOR THE SPRING CAMPAIGN.

Our Place in the Procession is Close up to the Band.

James T. Johnson & Co. Great Western Circus used this newspaper ad in Gaylord, Kansas in 1885. Kansas Historical Society.

Monitor reported that, "Johnson & Co.'s circus was not very large or pretentious, but it left a favourable impression here nevertheless. The managers were gentlemanly and the attaches were orderly and well-behaved. One very commendable feature of the concern is that no hangers-on, in the way of sharpers and swindlers, are permitted. It is free from this abominable nuisance."

A gesture that ensured much favourable comment was Johnson's gift of free tickets to all members of the Sergeant Mercer Post, the local post of the G. A. R.

Johnson's total newspaper advertising for the Wayne date of June 8, consisted of three short paragraphs in the Wayne *Register*, June 6.

"Six Kontortionists and three Komically Klumsy Klowns, at the circus Monday.

"Everybody come to the jamboree (circus) Monday, June 8, and see the grand ring performance, Japanese act, tight-rope walking, etc.

"James T. Johnson & Co.'s Great Western overland circus will be there Monday, June 8. Everyone turn out and see the elephant."

Johnson had no elephant, but the *Register* was impressed enough to remark after the exhibitions the "The circus seemed to be rather slim in some parts while in other respects it was very good."

The *Register*'s comment that, "Mrs. Johnson wounded the feelings of some of our modest young men in some of her touching circus songs," leaves one wondering about

the nature of her songs and the innocence of the "modest young men." Equally enigmatic is the concluding statement that, "She must remember that all men are not like hers."

"Just think of it," the *Register* boasted, "Wayne is only ten months old and has nearly 200 inhabitants."

The Scandia *Journal* commented on June 5, that, "The traveling humbugs are making themselves pretty 'numerous' in this locality. Seaman's Dime Entertainment struck the city last Monday night, and Johnson's circus (?) (sic), the greatest humbug of all, is billed for next week."

Johnson appeared on June 10, but presented nothing to soften the *Journal*'s opinion. The *Journal* disposed of the show with one sentence. "J. T. Johnson's humbug--falsely termed a circus--had a decidedly thin crowd, last Wednesday."

The *Cloud County Kansan*, published in Jamestown, was more charitable toward Johnson than was the Scandia *Journal*. The Jamestown exhibitions of June 12, were reported by the *Kansan* as follows: "A crowd came into town Friday to attend the James T. Johnson and Co.'s Circus. This is the same circus that showed here last year and while it retains all the attractions it had then, has added some new and amusing features. This show is entirely free from street thieves and robbers and we highly commend the policy of its proprietors in excluding all such swindlers."

For June 17, Johnson ran a rare one column display ad in the *Downs Times* of June 4. In the northern tier of Kansas counties along the Nebraska border, Johnson encountered opposition from Hunter's Consolidated Shows. Hunter provided an excellent contrast to Johnson's "lilly-white" image, for the Hunter show was one of the greediest group of thieves that ever operated in Kansas, exceeded only by Ben Wallace. The *Times* covered both shows in one paragraph: "Two circuses here this week. Johnson's which was here yesterday (June 17) was very good, but Hunter's, which was here Tuesday (June 16) was remarkable only for the crowd of gamblers with it. It should not have been allowed to stop in town at all."

The *Osborne County Farmer*, Osborne, reviewing the events of circus day, June 18, belittled the Johnson show with a candid opinion: "Real merit does not figure with the people of Kansas when they want to go to a circus. It is only necessary to advertise under that name, and a good attendance is assured. The show of last week, however, was a little from the biggest (sic) fraud ever perpetrated on a long-suffering community. The menagerie consisted of two cages of animals, one containing the ticket agent and the other two coyotes, a rabbit and a monkey. In the ring the only features were bar performances, tumbling, jugglery and pantomime foolishness by two clowns. The only commendable features were the absence of gamblers and

thieves and a fair band of music. The gentlemanly manager requested us to express our candid opinion of his 'grand aggregation' and mail him a copy, which we have done."

The *Western Empire*, Alton, carried a handout on June 6 concerning the exhibitions of June 20. The only variance from other handouts was the statement that "The celebrated Trakene stallion, 'Johnson,' will be introduced by Col. Johnson."

On the 20th the *Empire* remarked, "Today is circus day. If all reports are true this show don't amount to very much, and our people will do well to keep their money in their pockets."

Prior to 1885 Alton was not Alton, but carried the original name of Bull's City in honor of its founder General Bull. The General and two of his employees in 1879 were gored to death one afternoon by Bull's pet elk.

The Gaylord *Herald* of June 11 presented a radical change in the newspaper advertising of the Johnson show, running a display ad of two columns with an unheard of second insertion on June 18. Another advance was the appearance of several short handouts, short, but several time the length of anything used previously.

According to the *Herald*, Johnson was playing so many stands in northern Kansas "on account of having a contract to show at Red Cloud (NE) July 4th."

Johnson played Gaylord on June 23, following Hunter's Consolidated Shows which exhibited there on June 17. The *Herald*, after Hunter had left town, reported that, "Hunter's gambling outfit struck town yesterday, but didn't seem to find many suckers. They carry a sort of show with them, but it is only a secondary consideration."

The Portis *Patriot* mentioned that, "Hunter's Great Show passed through Portis last Wednesday (June 17) en route to Gaylord. It was composed of two soap dealers and a dog."

A week later the *Patriot* noted that, "Hunter's Great Dog and Soap Show passed through this town last Tuesday (June 23) going east. And you bet your sweet life they are a hard looking set of pills."

After Johnson had departed Gaylord, the *Herald* made no report on the events of the day or the size of the crowd, but it is doubtful that the Hunter show had any deleterious effect on the Great Western.

The Harlan *Chief*, speaking of the exhibitions of June 24, had harsh things to say: "Johnson's circus and menagerie exhibited at this place Wednesday. People who attended it were greatly disappointed. It was a complete fizzle. The menagerie consisted of two rabbits, a coyote and two birds. The performing by the people in tights was very tiresome and uninteresting. The only good feature connected with the concern was the band, and perfect gentlemen (sic). The proper thing for the manager to do would be dis-

the show had come and gone, reported that: "Johnson's or rather Foster's show was here Thursday last. As a show, is not large, but has some good performers, and their band, led by Prof. Ben Becker, is really a splendid band. There is one thing we can say of this show outfit that cannot be said often of these shows, and that is, they are a first rate, jolly set of boys, and there is no cursing and swearing, and no gambling allowed on their ground. We think that is praise enough for one show."

At Kirwin on June 27, the show became the center of a small storm by pitching its tents outside the city limits to avoid the city's \$25 license fee. Johnson—or Foster—requested permission for the band wagon to circulate through the town and consent was given by an assistant to the town marshall, a man who had no authority to authorize anything. Mayor Nolan appeared on the scene and forbade Johnson to parade, on the grounds that a show without a city license was not entitled to any governmental favors. Former mayor Horace Moulton insisted the band was within its right to parade since the music was free to all. The town was sharply divided on the mayor's ruling, and for a short period it seemed that violence might result.

The Kirwin *Independent* remarked that, "The most notable disposition to lawlessness was manifested by Horace Moulton, whose action shows how liable a town is to make a bad choice in electing its first Mayor. [Moulton was the first mayor of Kirwin.] He swelled up, even a little above the usual proportions, and declared the Mayor had no right to stop that band from playing, and proposed to drive their wagon around town for them, if they would play. The showmen gentlemanly and sensibly declined to accept the courtesy."

The *Independent* strongly supported Mayor Nolan, and ridiculed Horace Moulton, partly, no doubt, because Moulton published the *Kirwin Chief*, the *Independent*'s only competitor. Neither the *Chief* nor the *Independent* made any comment on the worth of the show or the size of the audiences.

Johnson played Phillipsburg on June 30, and the *Phillipsburg Herald* was not hesitant to proclaim its displeasure with offerings of the Great Western. On July 4, the *Herald* ran the following: "Johnson's show exhibited here last Tuesday, and took away the usual amount of small change. It is strange how these traveling concerns presume on the ignorance of the public. The procession of this show consisted of a band wagon, a cage of coyotes, a pony in a go-cart and a peel-garlic clown in a coffee sack costume. There were a few hand-springs, some horizontal bar floppings, a little trapeze balancing, and--well that was about all. During the enactment of the 'lone fisherman,' there was a painful vacuum, during which the audience sank into a gentle slumber, and happily dreamed that they not attend the show. They

June 30th.

**JAMES T. JOHN-
SON & CO'S Great
Western Circus and
Museum will exhibit
at Phillipsburg, on
Tuesday, June 30.
Be sure and wait for
the Big Show. Do
not forget the date,**

June 30th.

The Phillipsburg, Kansas *Herald* made up this plain newspaper ad for the Johnson show for a June 30, 1885 date. Kansas Historical Society.

band at once, or add something to the thing that would entitle it to the name of circus and menagerie."

With the Smith Centre date of June 25, a new dimension to the Great Western is displayed with the recognition of Col. Foster in the management as owner of the show. Nowhere does the press provide any information concerning Foster, his previous circus experience, his relationship to Johnson, or his claim to the show. Possibly, Foster purchased the show, but it seems more likely to the author that Johnson, with his perpetual financial anemia, lost the show by foreclosure or attachment, but the date of the take-over cannot be ascertained.

The use of the new two-column ad boasting of 25 famous performers which first appeared on June 11, and the expanded handouts certainly indicate a major change in the affairs of the show, but for the next several dates the title used was James T. Johnson & Co.'s Great Western Circus and Museum of Living Wonders.

The *Kansas Pioneer* of Smith Centre (the spelling was later changed to Center) after

were finally awoken from this blissful delusion by the barking of Geo. Spaulding's dog Jack, who came in collision with the learned pig. In speaking of the pig, reminds us that we owe it and the educated pony an apology, for this did exhibit some little degree of sense. They should learn a lesson, however, of old dog tray. The absence of gamblers and thieves with the show commends it to the public, even though there be no performance at all, and that fact is the one redeeming trait of the institution. P.S.--If the show is not satisfied with this notice we will pay for complimentary tickets as we do not choose to be muzzled by them."

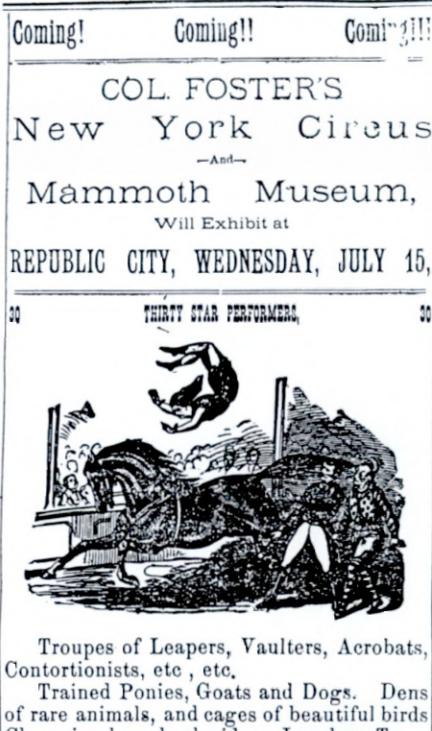
The Long Island *Argus* of June 25 ran a handout concerning the Johnson show that was a new departure in the press relations and undoubtedly was due to Col. Foster, although the title exploited still featured the Johnson name with no mention of Foster.

"JAS. T. JOHNSON & CO'S. CIRCUS.

"As announced last week, this complete organization will exhibit at Long Island Wednesday afternoon and evening July 1st. There will be a free outside show at 1 and 7 o'clock, when La Petite Ella, the Child Wonder of the age, will ascend a single wire stretched from the ground to the top of the center pole, performing numerous thrilling feats on her perilous voyage. At the same time Prof. Ben Becker's world renowned Reed and Cornet Band, will render a select program of popular music, upon the outside of the tents. This company embraces some of the most celebrated artists of the arena profession, including such prominent names as Mdlle. Editha the famous bare-back equestrian; the favourite Johnson Sisters, in their great Ladder and Spanish Ring acts; the champion Lerbey, in his matchless performance upon the Horizontal and complex Bar; Signor Harris, with his ladder of Damascus Swords, sharpened to the keenest edge, upon which he performs most marvelous feats, in his bare feet; Edna Johnson, the infant prodigy, with her trained ponies; the three great Clowns, led by the peer of all jesters, Mr. James Murray; Mr. Marion, the acknowledged 'King of the air,' in his unequalled performance upon the flying Trapeze; Ed. Murphey, the great Irish Comedian, with his comical elephant; Mdlle. Elbe, the accomplished slack wire walker, Japanese Juggler, and Indian club swinger; Signor Leon, the champion bare-back rider of the world, in his dashing rendition of equestrianism; troupes of leapers, vaulters, acrobats and gymnasts; trained horses and animals, and everything that goes to make up a complete tented exhibition. The manager makes special announcements that none of his patrons will be annoyed by the confidence games, or other objectionable schemes usual with some shows, as no such features are tolerated under any circumstances, or in any form whatever. Do not forget the place and date, and let Long Island give

the show such a turn out that will make the town notorious enough to warrant travelling combinations to work the place as a sure stand each year."

The show drove from Phillipsburg to Long Island in a torrential rain, arriving about 11 a.m., too late for a matinee. At night the Ar-



Troupes of Leapers, Vaulters, Acrobats, Contortionists, etc., etc.

Trained Ponies, Goats and Dogs. Dens of rare animals, and cages of beautiful birds. Champion bare-back riders, Jugglers, Trapeze Artists and Horizontal-bar Performers.

A high wire ascension by Signor Harris, and Promenade Concert by Prof. Becker's Reed and Cornet Band, will be given daily at 1 and 7 o'clock. Don't forget the day and date of the Show. Popular price of Admission.

Newspaper ad used by the Col. Foster's New York Circus in Republic City, Kansas on July 10, 1885. Kansas Historical Society.

gus reported, "an entertainment was given to a fairly large house considering the inclement weather. The performance was not up to the standard of the 'greatest show on earth,' still was reasonably good. The horizontal bar act was cleverly executed as was the contortion and trapeze acts. The entertainment upon the whole, gave general satisfaction. The music furnished by the band was excellent."

Like all other newspapers, the *Argus* was impressed by the absence of fakirs and gamblers.

The exact date of Johnson's withdrawal from his association with Col. Foster is unknown to the author, but it occurred early in July, for the Simpson *Siftings* reported on July 16, that "Jas. T. Johnson and Chas. Simpson are organizing a circus and museum at Glen Elder."

Apparently all of the performances of the

Great Western, except for the Johnson family, stayed on with Col. Foster's New York Circus and Mammoth Museum. On July 10, the Republic City *News* ran a two column ad for the exhibitions of July 15.

The New York Circus boasted of "Thirty Star Performers," including "Troupes of Leapers, Vaulters, Acrobats, Contortionists, etc., etc."

"Trained Ponies, Goats and Dogs. Dens of rare animals, and cages of beautiful birds. Champion bare-back riders, Jugglers, Trapeze Artists and Horizontal-bar Performers.

"A high wire ascension by Signor Harris, and Promenade Concert by Prof. Becker's Reed and Cornet Band, will be given daily at 1 and 7 o'clock. Don't forget the day and date of the Show. Popular price of Admission."

The *News* had no comment on the show but it did remark that, "The Billiard Hall done an exceedingly fine (?) (sic) business on circus day, until they were closed by the city Marshal, about 5 o'clock. Their customers were getting too boisterous."

The New York Circus exhibited at Barr Oak on July 16. The tragedy at Barr Oak when Orton's Anglo American played the town the year before was still fresh in the mind of the public. The town's blacksmith was killed by random shots fired by circus personnel and the mayor, A. W. Mann, severely wounded. Mann spent the rest of his life in a wheel chair. The Beloit *Western Democrat* reported that, "Col. Foster gave Mr. Mann the benefit of both the afternoon and evening performances, upon the principle that a show did the injury, therefore a show should remedy it as far as possible."

The benefit was a noble gesture, but, according to the Barr Oak *Herald*, fell short of the intent, for "Foster's show lacked \$35 of making the amount they claimed as expenses, consequently Mr. Mann's 'benefit' was \$35 below par."

The *Herald* also observed that, "The 'twenty solo artists' comprising Col. Foster's band (in the advertisement) dwindled down to eight very ordinary musicians."

Foster played Beloit on July 18; Lyons on August 3; and Hazelton on August 15.

The newspaper advertising for the Hazelton date consisted of ten brief paragraphs inserted in the news columns by the advance agent, D. G. Alger, who the Hazelton *Express* described as "a very pleasant and sociable man to do business with."

"Col. Foster's show which exhibited Saturday, was as good as the average of wagon shows, or would have been," the *Express* reported, "had he had some good equestrianism added to the other performances. As it was we have no fault to find, and think all were satisfied with the performance. Their band was the best part of the show."

When the show left town George Winters went with it, but he returned home Septem-

ber 22. The *Express* said, "He is not stuck on the show business."

For the Attica date on August 17, the *Advocate* reported "fair crowds afternoon and evening."

The last report the author has for Col. Foster's New York Circus was for the exhibitions of August 19 at Anthony. The *Harper County Enterprise* reported that it "was withal a fair entertainment and received very good support."

The new show of Johnson, Simpson & Co.'s Consolidated Circus and Museum, organized in mid-season in Glen Elder, opened its doors for the first time on July 25 in the village of Glen Elder. At the time no newspaper was being published in Glen Elder, but the *Western Democrat*, Beloit, reported on July 24, that, "Glen Elder is to have a circus Saturday. They know it is a good one, for it is a home made concern."

Other Kansas towns favored with exhibitions included: August 15, Logan; August 18, Stockton; August 21, Millbrook; August 22, WaKeeney; August 24, Ellis; August 25, Hays City; August 26, La Crosse; August 27, Bazine; August 28, Ness City; August 29, Jetmore; September 2, Larned; September 7, Lake City; September 9, Kiowa Evening only.

Following the Logan date of August 15, the *Phillips County Freeman*, Logan, had nice things to say about the show.

"While there has been many better exhibitions, there has been at the same time many worse. It is but justice to say that it was one of the most orderly and quiet circuses that we ever saw. Every one of the company seemed disposed to do their best to entertain the patrons. One of the contortionists was very good. Mr. and Mrs. Cutts are very fair trapeze performers. The little Johnson girls were very cute and will in time make fine performers."

The *Plainview Press*, speaking of the exhibitions at Stockton on August 18 reported that the show "was run by the most gentlemanly set of men we ever seen with a circus. The show was good and had some of the best performers of any circus in the west. No gamblers are allowed to accompany it, and taking it altogether Johnson, Simpson & Co.'s. circus is a complete success and a show which any one need not be ashamed to attend."

Millbrook, a village close to Hill City, saw Johnson-Simpson on August 21. The only report on the show was an advertisement in the *Hill City Reveille*. Millbrook did not have a newspaper. The entire community was abandoned c. 1889, and disappeared from the map of Kansas.

The advance was being handled competently by T. (Tom) B. Saddler. The name was sometimes spelled with only one "d". At Wa-Keeney for the exhibitions of August 22, Saddler placed an advertisement that was used frequently in following towns. The ad, in the form of a news story, provides the best description we have of the Johnson-Simpson show and is quoted in its entirety: "Johnson, Simpson & Co.'s Consolidated Circus and Museum will exhibit at Wa-Keeney, Saturday, Aug. 22nd, afternoon and evening. This combined organization includes twenty-five of the most prominent artists in the arena

brated dog circus; Ruble and Armes, the great double contortionists; Miss Nellie Cutts, the favorite Japanese Juggler, Indian Club-swinger, and slack wire artist; Frank Showers, the human Salamander, in his wonderful evolutions. Prof. John McKinstry's reed and cornet band will furnish the music for the entire entertainment. In the museum department will be found Madame Devere, the Kentucky Bearded Woman; Sylvia Zobriskie, the Circassian Lady; the wild men of Borneo; dens of wild animals and cages of rare birds; Signor Bartino, the Fire Eater, sword swallower and magician; the talking machine, calliope, and a host of other curiosities, freaks of nature, strange beasts, etc., etc. Col. Johnson, the manager, desires the public to understand that his patrons will not be annoyed by any gambling schemes, or other objectionable features peculiar with some shows, as they are not tolerated under this management under any circumstances, or in any way whatever. There will be a grand free outside exhibition, to which all are invited, at 1 and 7 o'clock, at which time La Petite Ella, a little girl of nine years of age, will ascend a single wire to the towering center pole top, performing numerous thrilling and difficult feats during her perilous voyage.

Prof. John McKinstry's celebration band will at the same hour, give a free Promenade Concert on the outside of the tents. Do not forget the day and date of the big show, and, also, that a performance will be given both afternoon and evening, and that all free advertised programmes will be fully carried out, rain or shine."

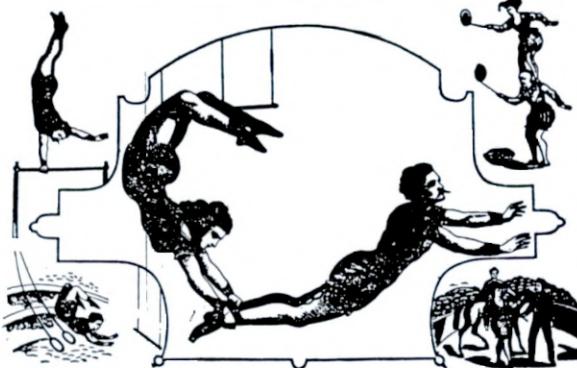
The first circus ever to play Ness City was that of Johnson, Simpson & Co. on August 28. The *Ness City Times* was not favorably impressed with the aggregation: "The circus has been here and gone. While the museum of living curiosities was conspicuously absent. (unless the bearded woman be considered a museum,) and while an ordinary mule constituted the entire circus, still the show was worth going to see, and about 500 persons attended the afternoon, and about 300 the evening performance. The girl walked the wire rope, the clown and ring master, the tumblers, and the greatest contortionist of the country were there. To be sure it was not as great as it might have been, but Ness City has had her first circus."

In another column the *Times* reported, "Before the evening performance at the circus was finished according to programme last Friday a lively Kansas breeze came up and the people began to hie themselves home. They had not all departed, however,

Now Open at Medicine Lodge, Kansas

Jas. T. Johnson & Co's. Amphitheatre.

JAS. T. JOHNSON & CO., Proprietors..... GEO. LUPROU, Business Manager.



Equestrians, Gymnasts, Acrobats, Minstrels, Comedy, Burlesque and Variety Combined.

Performance Every Evening, Except Sunday. Matinee Every Saturday Afternoon.

Change of Programme 3 Times a Week!

Something New All the Time!

James T. Johnson & Co's Amphitheater as advertised in Medicine Lodge, Kansas for a date in December of 1885. Kansas Historical Society.

profession. In the circus department we find Charles Simpson, the Master of Horse *par excellence*, with his wonderful imported trained Trakene Stallions; Madame Editha, the champion female bare-back equestrienne; the Nelsons, the celebrated double and flying trapeze artists; Charles Morison, the leader of all 'India Rubber men,' in astonishing contortions, and flights upon the Japanese Perche; Sig. Leon, the Wizzard horseman, in hurdle and trick riding; Sam Bennett, the champion leaper of the world, in his wonderful evolutions through space; the Johnson sisters, in their thrilling performances upon the double ladders; La Petite Ella, the 'Sun-burst' of the arena, in her matchless representations upon the Flying Spanish Rings; Lee Powell, Billy Cutts and John Armes, the peerless singing acrobatic and knock about clowns of the country; Edna Johnson, the infant prodigy, with her trained ponies, goats and monkeys. Prof. Harvey Mackey, with his cele-

when the pressure became to great for the tent, the center pole snapped in twain and the great canvas came down with a crash. Fortunately, only one person was hurt—one of the show girls—and she not seriously."

The following day at Jetmore on August 29 was reported by the *Jetmore Reveille* of September 2.

"The circus came and so did the people. It was torn up by a windstorm in Ness City, and did not arrive in town until the afternoon. Two performances were given, however, and considering all things, the word creditable might be applied to them. There were no horses used in the performance. Morrison the contortionist will be hard to beat. The actors, in general, were good, but could not come out the utmost of their ability owing to their cramped surroundings. The circus developed the fact that settlers are plentiful, as Jetmore was crowded. Some poor fellows wept bitterly mentally, because they were captured on a jury and held 'till 12 o'clock Saturday night."

The advertising for Lake City on September 7, added the names of Mlle. Zomarra, Hindoo snake charmer, and Henrietta Ruble, the "three-headed songstress." Considering the weather the *Kansas Prairie Dog*, Lake City, thought the show "was fairly attended."

Newly advertised for the Kiowa date on September 9, were the names of Henri Gonzales and son, "the celebrated Mexican riders," and Edna Costello and her trained ponies.

The *Kiowa Herald* reported that, "The shows have come and gone. The lateness of their arrival in our city prevented them from giving but one exhibition, and that came off at night. The tent was literally crowded. A portion of the performances were first class, and was duly appreciated by the audience."

The writer does not know where nor when the Johnson-Simpson season ended, but Col. Johnson, the "Old Reliable," without Charles Simpson, surfaced in Medicine Lodge full of ideas for the coming winter.

The *Barber County Index* Medicine Lodge, reported October 16, that, "Jas. T. Johnson, the circus man, is making arrangements to erect in this city an amphitheatre or circus house for the winter. He also expects to train his horses and give occasional exhibitions, with a full brass band, a menagerie and other attractions. He will start his circus from here in the spring. Citizens are making liberal donations to encourage the enterprise."

Construction was well under way when a windstorm blew down the structure. Johnson reacted to this piece of typical Johnson luck by starting afresh on the amphitheatre. Per-

sistence was Johnson's most obvious trait. In a report on the rebuilding, carried in the *Index* of November 20, the editor belittled the magnificence of the structure and displayed a sort of sneering skepticism regarding the cultural level of the entertainment to be offered the public, deriding the project with an overblown vocabulary.

"Last week we mentioned the calamity to our town by the wind storm, which blew down the colossal and gigantic amphitheater,

were present in Johnson & Co.'s amphitheatre to witness the opening performance, and they were well paid for their attendance. The building is tightly enclosed, warmed with immense heaters, the seats are comfortable and the audience could see and hear everything that occurred. There is a large saw-dust ring, with a high centre-pole, and suspended from this is the trapeze rings and machinery for the aerial performances. On the north side is a large stage, supplied with curtains and scenery and this is where the troupe gives a first-class variety performance, including minstrel, songs, dances and farces. There is a place for the orchestra to the right of the stage and this filled by a first-class band, imported from Michigan. This band also gives a street parade every day and a free open air concert in the evening. Though everything was new on the opening night, the performance acquitted themselves creditably. Mr. Johnson and his co-laborers have reason to be proud of their success. This place of amusement is open every evening, except Sunday. A family matinee occurs every Saturday afternoon. All this week the amphitheatre has been liberally patronized and everything points to its remaining popular. For particulars read the advertisement in this paper and look out for the small bills on the street."

The first night's take was \$225.

The Amphitheatre was an audacious undertaking for a county boasting a population in 1883 of 2,661 persons, and not many more in 1885. It might also be considered a monument to the persuasive powers of James T. Johnson, and his poor judgement. But in the beginning everything was splendid.

Newspaper advertising did not appear until after the opening, December 10, in the *Cresset* and a day later in the *Index*. Both ads proclaimed "Equestrians, Gymnasts, Comedy, Burlesque & Variety, Acrobats, Minstrels, Clowns." The ad in the *Index* declared "Performance Every Evening, Except Sunday. Matinee Every Saturday Afternoon. Change of Programs 3 Times a Week! Something New All the Time!"

James T. Johnson & Co. was listed as proprietor and Geo. Louproil, business manager.

The editor of the *Cresset* acknowledged "a kind invitation extended to us by R. M. Brown to occupy his private box at the Amphitheatre. Bob has fitted up a neat and tasty box, at considerable expense for himself and friends."

The 16th and 17th of December found Johnson's troupe playing at the skating rink in the nearby town of New Kiowa.

The performance of December 19 pleased the editor of the *Cresset*: "The burnt cork artists which belong to this company are as handy with their feet as any we ever seen. Their jig dances can hardly be excelled. In fact this can be said of nearly all the performers. The trapeze act of the Louproils received special applause. Col. Johnson

EVERY EVENING (Except Sunday) AND SATURDAY AFTERNOON

J. T. JOHNSON & CO'S.

AMPHITHEATER!

MEDICINE LODGE, KANSAS

JAS. T. JOHNSON & CO., Proprietors, Business Manager.

GEORGE LOUPROIL.

ADMISSION. RESERVED SEATS. CHILDREN.

35 CENTS. 50 CENTS. 75 CENTS.

Equestrians, Gymnasts, Comedy, Burlesque & Variety, Acrobats, Minstrels, Clowns.

Strictly Refined in Every Respect.

In this Medicine Lodge newspaper ad Johnson spelled Amphitheater differently. Kansas Historical Society.

but the recuperative energy and enterprise of the citizens in rebuilding it in so short a time is simply wonderful, and the people of Medicine Lodge will soon be gratified with avision of the marvelously moral concatenated aggregation of the world's aquatic and amphibian monsters sporting in their native element, together with the gorgeous galaxy of terrestrial arenic demonstrators who excel ancient Rome in their megatherium acts and Bulgarian atrocities, before which the starry firmament pales and the crowd heads of Europe tremble."

According to the Medicine Lodge *Cresset*, the building on First Avenue West was seventy-five feet in diameter and contained a large dressing room, horse stable, a stage and private boxes leased to the well-to-do. The amphitheater had a gala opening on Saturday evening, December 5. The following account appeared in the *Index*, December 11:

"The Amphitheatre.

"Last Saturday evening six hundred people

brought on some of his trained horses for the first time Tuesday night (December 15). Hereafter there will be regular exhibitions of bareback riding to give variety to the performances."

On New Year's Eve the company presented the drama *Hidden Hand*.

Nothing ever worked for long for James T. Johnson and the last day of the year marked the beginning of the decline of the Amphitheatre with the replacement of

George Louproil by actor Lon West, for reasons never explained.

Johnson, like the Biblical Job, was tested nearly beyond all endurance, Johnson's life was a constant struggle against the elements, against unbridled authority, and, worst of all, a fight against financial failure and the wolf at the door. Brief periods of prosperity graced his long career, but in the main it was a hand to mouth existence dictated by expediency. Like all showmen he expected "to-

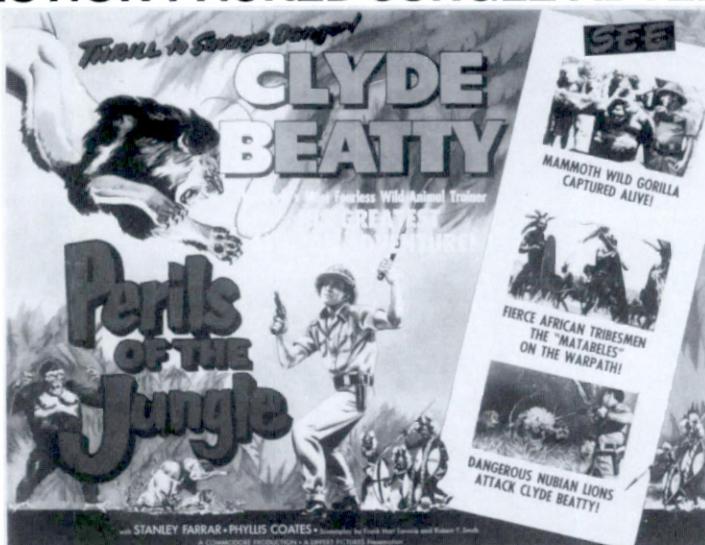
morrow" to be the biggest day of the season. Today and yesterday might be disasters, but tomorrow would be a winner. Johnson struggled on when a more perceptive man would have quit.

His frustration never exceeded his optimism.

The New Year brought no relief.

Research funded by grants from: Wolfe's Camera Shops, Inc., Topeka, Kansas and First National Bank of Kansas, Topeka.

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- * PLUS - MUCH, MUCH MORE!



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UNTIL NOW!

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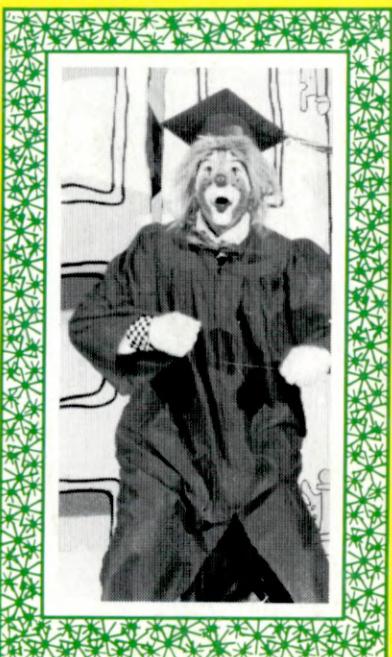
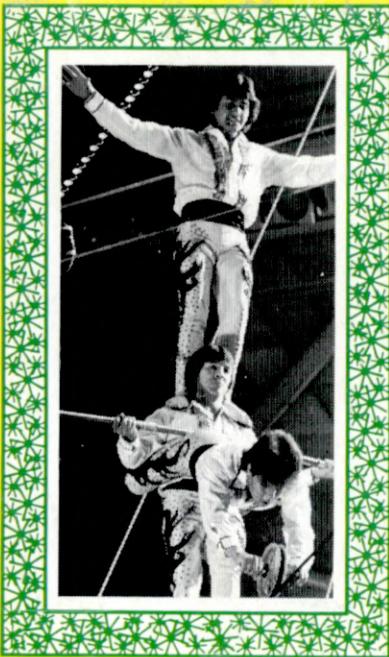
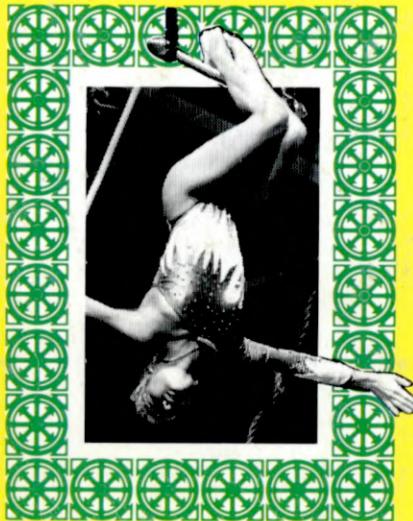
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